



House Bill 2004A – Home Forward – Written Testimony – May 2nd, 2017

Good morning Chair Gelser, Vice Chair Olsen and members of the Senate Committee on Human Services. My name is Michael Buonocore and I am the Executive Director of Home Forward, the housing authority serving Multnomah County.

Home Forward receives federal funding and our mission is to serve the most vulnerable people in our community. So we are not a typical landlord but we are here today to use our voice as Oregon's largest provider of affordable housing to advocate for good policy, collaboration, efficiency and local decision making to help Oregonians who are experiencing poverty.

I believe that House Bill 2004 offers an important opportunity for Oregon to address our state's housing crisis. Renters and landlords in Bend are facing different issues that we are in Portland, and coastal communities have their own specific housing problems. By lifting statewide prohibitions, local jurisdictions will be able to introduce and implement policies that make sense for their communities.

Our voucher program helps over 9,000 households afford private market housing by subsidizing a portion of their rent. Typically, families pay about 30% of their income towards rent and we cover the rest. This helps families meet their other basic needs.

This program is incredibly successful but rent increases and “no cause” evictions make it less stable. As rents have skyrocketed, our federal funding hasn't kept pace. “No cause” evictions create trauma for the people we serve and diminishes the capacity of our staff who have to repeat processes and procedures every time a voucher holder is forced to move.

If a family is evicted for “no cause,” Home Forward has the flexibility to give them up to six months to find a new place before they lose their voucher. It seems like a long time but in our current market, some people can't find a home and have to give back their voucher.

A mom with a voucher we'll call “Mary” received a “no cause” eviction notice at her N Portland apartment in June. Mary lives with a disability and was really scared to leave the neighborhood where she had always lived. Her friends and neighbors helped provide childcare for her two kids and her relationships eased her anxiety and depression.

Mary and her kids would be homeless today if it wasn't for an organization called Impact NW who work with some of our most vulnerable voucher holders. When they could not find her an apartment in the 90 day "no cause" window, Impact NW put Mary and her kids in a motel. They paid the bills for two months as they continued to help Mary search for housing in our red hot rental market. Eventually, Mary and her support team located an apartment she could afford but it was far from her old neighborhood. Her kids were forced to change schools and she is struggling to stabilize in her new home, Mary's anxiety is so bad now that it is hard for her to even leave her apartment.

Mary and her kids had Home Forward and Impact NW to help them and even with a team of housing experts by her side, it still took over five months to find her an apartment. Most people don't have that kind of support system and they are forced to navigate this unprecedented market on their own, and many of them are not as lucky as Mary.

Home Forward is also a landlord. We manage a portfolio of over 6,500 units in over 100 buildings and we do so without using "no cause" evictions. Our portfolio serves people with very low incomes, Oregonians with significant physical and mental health issues, the working poor, and families and individuals transitioning from homelessness. We only use "for cause" evictions in our portfolio.

For the population that Home Forward serves, we know that an eviction can lead to homelessness. So we're only going to evict someone and ultimately add pressure to other parts of system if there is demonstrable cause for that eviction.

Homelessness is hell for the people experiencing it and it is really expensive for taxpayers and for the state as a whole. In Portland's current housing market, almost every family that receives a "no cause" eviction notice is immediately at risk of homelessness.

All Oregonians share the expense of an eviction. They add stress to the shelter network, to our nonprofit and social service community, to the healthcare system, to employers, and to schools. There are serious financial consequences involved with an eviction, and we all pay a price.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M Buonocore", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael Buonocore
Executive Director
Home Forward