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May 3, 2017

Senator Gelser  
Chair Senate Humman Services Committee  
Salem, Oregon  
shs.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov

Re: House Bill 2004A

Dear Senator Gelser:

I am an attorney in Eugene. I have practice Landlord-Tenant law for more than 20 years in and around Lane county.

I have seen so many times how brutal and life wrenching a no-cause termination can be. Sometimes with nothing more than a 30 day notice families are ripped from their community, from their neighbors, and children from their local schools.

Families are forced to find time in their busy lives to locate affordable new housing close to jobs, friends, and schools. This can be difficult for working families. Often children must be removed from their schools and friends. If they can find another place that is available, affordable, and that fits their needs, they must often come up with a first and last month's rent and a security deposit. Their current landlord is not required to return deposit moneys they hold until 30 days after the termination of the current rental agreement. This combined with an increasing trend of landlords just pocketing deposits and threatening tenants if they try to get it back, means that tenant's current deposits are unavailable to them to apply to a new rental. This means renters must essentially come up with two security deposits.

Many renters live paycheck to paycheck and a no-cause termination can be the first step toward homelessness. Even the 60 day period for tenants who have lived in a rental for more than a year does not help with the fundamental problems caused by no-cause evictions.

Tenants are at the mercy of landlords. Currently there is NO enforcement of landlord-tenant laws in the state. As available housing stocks shrink, abuse of tenants increase. There is currently no defense to a no-cause termination. No-cause terminations are universally used as a pretext. Currently the most common reason for a “no-cause” termination is retaliation, but they are also used as a pretext for other unlawful purposes including blatant racial, ethnic, and gender discrimination. Potential landlords understand how no-cause termination are used and often discriminate against those whose previous rental was terminated for “no-cause.”

House Bill 2004A is an attempt to address some of the power imbalance between landlords and tenants. The market and the law in this state are currently stacked against tenants. Homelessness is increasing in our state as is the abuse of tenants. Building more housing will not fix these problem.

I urge you and all the members of your committee to support this bill as a first step in addressing the problems faced by renters in this state. House Bill 2004A will help provide stability and security for the millions of renters and slow the increase of homelessness in our state.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Matthew Johnson  
Attorney at Law