

Dear Senate Human Services Committee,

I am a tenant in Portland Oregon and a tenant organizer.

I received a no-cause eviction in 1998 when I was the young teen mother of a 6-month old baby. Apparently someone in my apartment complex thought I had a new boyfriend and found this unsavory. (The onsite managers told me that they weren't running "a whore house".) So I was given a no-cause. This is what landlords mean when they say it's hard to "prove" the cause. It's hard because there's no proof, because the cause they are claiming isn't actually real. This type of thing happens ALL THE TIME. The reality of my situation was that someone had opinions about what company young women and young moms should keep and they didn't want my perceived (but not based in reality) indiscretions to sully their virtuous apartment community. This is blatantly discriminatory and if they had used a for-cause it would have been a violation of the fair housing act. This is exactly why no-cause is used -- and exactly why landlords are fighting so hard to hang onto it. If every no cause was for a legal cause, then it wouldn't be the end of the world to them to outlaw no-cause, just a minor inconvenience of more paperwork. There's a reason they don't want to go to the courts; most of their no-cause evictions wouldn't be allowed.

Please don't believe the lies about for-cause evictions. They don't have to go on a tenant's record. They give the tenant a chance to understand the cause and address it (in order to stay) before ever getting near the court system. A no-cause is an end run around the fair housing act, and allows for retaliation. It is NOT a favor to tenants. It means the tenant never has bargaining power, or the power to exert their rights. Especially those in the most marginalized and vulnerable communities. (I would include single moms here.) Even if they are sometimes used in lieu of a valid for-cause, that they make discrimination and retaliation embarrassingly possible and easy, should make it a no-brainer to outlaw.

We need to take immediate action on displacement and the social costs that it has on our community. My no-cause led to me losing my job at Red Robin because I had to move out to Hillsboro, didn't have a car, and the Max line wasn't yet online. I took cabs to work (which consumed my income, making it very hard to pay the bills) after walking my daughter a mile along a busy road to her new daycare (which I now had to pay for because I didn't have my next door neighbors to watch her for free) and after the 3rd time I was more than 5 minutes late I was fired. I was on the express train to poverty -- a needless entrant to the over-burdened social services system. A friend ended up giving me free housing for 4 years, which allowed me to right my ship and get to college. That is the power of housing stability. We can get all Oregonians housing stability by protecting them from arbitrary eviction and stabilizing their rent. This is the most critical anti-poverty measure you could possibly take.

I was extremely disappointed by the amendments to the original house bill. Please consider amending it back to include 3 months of relocation (moving is expensive. If landlords can't afford it, why can tenants?) and to protect ALL tenants (not just those with "big" landlords). Small landlords can be among some of the best and most humane, they can also be some of the most discriminatory and flagrantly abusive. They need to be regulated too! And their tenants deserve the same protections!

Thank you for recognizing the systemic issues associated with forced displacement and taking strong action to prevent and mitigate it.

Margot Black