

Ecumenical Ministries *of Oregon*

June 21, 2023

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Anderson, Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Kim Wagner and I am a Public Policy Associate with the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. In partnership with over 150 congregations, organizations, and interfaith partners, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) works with and for Oregonians through participating in community-supported political advocacy and providing direct services for thousands of people through our 6 different programs to serve Oregonians who are immigrants, refugees, experiencing homelessness, or low-income — including the Northeast Emergency Food Pantry, which was the busiest food pantry in the state during the peak of the pandemic. **I write in support of SB 611.**

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Many of the Oregonians we serve, especially those who utilize our food pantry, are families struggling with the cost of rent on top of other living expenses. We see this statewide, as renters in Oregon pay the ninth highest rent in the nation. Story after story from the people we serve has shown our friends and neighbors being priced out of their housing through rent increases everyday. These massive rent increases are occurring in both large and small communities across Oregon and speaks to the need to address this rental crisis. These increases may come to buildings, manufactured home parks, or individual families, but puts many people at risk of losing their housing.

We believe housing is a basic human right for all Oregonians and support housing being affordable and attainable for all. SB 611 reaffirms these ideals through its immediate mitigation of the current housing crisis while more long term housing solutions become available.

To illustrate the current problem in Oregon, under current law:

- 2023 rent increases for properties 15 or more years old can be as high as 14.6%. That is too high for anyone to afford as it outpaces wages and Social Security.
- There are no limits at all on rent increases in buildings 15 years or newer. Reports of extreme increases such as 32%, 47%, and 50% are becoming more and more common. These increases are the functional equivalent of an eviction as it prices people out of their housing.
- When people have to vacate due to no fault of their own, Oregon's tight and expensive rental market makes it hard to quickly find a new home.

SB 611 would:

- Limit rent increases to 3% + inflation with maximum increase of 8% during a calendar year.
- Narrow the loophole, applying rent stabilization to buildings older than 3 years, which increases the number of people protected while exempting new construction.
- Increase relocation assistance to three-months' rent to help tenants displaced through no fault of their own avoid houselessness. Landlords with four units or less are exempt from this provision.
- Set no limits on rent resets between tenants.

Oregon's housing emergency — and the need for a cap on rent increases — can be seen in every corner of Oregon. Studies show that just a \$100 increase in median rents in a community is tied to a 9% increase in houselessness in that community. More than 86% of all eviction filings are due to unaffordable rent. Oregon is currently experiencing some of the highest rates of houselessness in the country and with many of our friends and neighbors living just one rent increase away from houselessness, we cannot allow rent spikes and evictions to go unchecked.

SB 611 will stop runaway and extreme rent increases and protect more Oregonian renters from losing their housing. Oregon can and should do more to protect our friends and neighbors who are renting to ensure more people stay housed. We stand with the renters of Oregon faced with extreme rent increases or experiencing houselessness and ask the Legislature do the same in passing SB 611.

Sincerely,

Kim Wagner
Public Policy Associate
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon