

Submitter: Faren Leader
On Behalf Of: Over 4000 community college students
Committee: Senate Committee On Housing and Development
Measure: SB611

Good morning Senators,

Since February 2022 I have been serving as the HB2835 Benefits Navigator at Linn-Benton Community College in Albany. I represent more than 4,000 students at my institution. Our average student age is 27, and about a quarter of our students are also parents, so the housing needs of our students are diverse. In recent surveying, about 60% of our students are housing insecure. In over a year of my work at LBCC, every single week I have received contact from at least one student who is homeless or about to be. Our local shelters are often full and I have students trying to thrive in their studies while living in their cars, or worse.

In my role, I am proud to be part of a consortium with the Benefits Navigators from the 16 other community colleges in Oregon as well as all 7 of our four-year colleges and universities. In all, our consortium of 24 Benefits Navigators represent more than 250,000 college students, the future of our workforce and a population larger than that of our state capitol city. For the past year I have witnessed the other Benefits Navigators reporting similar experiences to mine-- their students are in desperate situations in regards to housing, and it's causing them to drop out. When I am able to secure emergency funding for a student for a rent or move-in costs situation, I am quite aware that I'm not actually procuring those funds for the student, I'm procuring them for their landlord.

It might be easy to say that if students want to have more housing security, perhaps they should work more hours outside of school. I can tell you that I have many students who are working full time, and are still struggling to contend with rising housing prices. Just today I communicated with a student in our auto technician program who is paying \$825 each month for his half of a 2 bedroom apartment shared with a roommate. His parents do not offer him any support, and because their financial info had to be included on his FAFSA, he receives very little financial aid. This student works full time at minimum wage while also contending with a challenging school program. Sometimes his work schedule causes him to miss classes which could impact his academic future, but he knows if he works less he will not be able to keep up with his most basic bills. At our minimum wage of \$13.50, at full time hours this student has a take-home income of about \$1,800 a month. This means nearly half of his income is spent on rent, and more than half is spent on housing overall once utility bills are counted. Someone who is spending more than half their income on rent is "severely rent burdened" according to federal standards, and this is considered a form of housing insecurity. That student's lease renews in

May 2023, and due to the 14.6% allowable rent increase this year, he can expect to see his rent increase from \$825 to as much as \$945. That's a difference of \$1,650 to \$1,890 for a 2 bedroom apartment. How can we possibly be okay with this? Even when minimum wage increases this summer, this student will still be at a net loss.

If we want to see a new generation of professionals successfully finish education and job training to take on essential job roles in our communities, we have to do better for them in regards to housing costs. I cannot allow the greed of landlords and management companies to be a major factor in harming the future of our workforce, and I hope you will not accept that outcome either. I urge you to pass SB611 as well as additional legislation in the near future to slow down rent increases so that students, and all residents of our communities, can retain the dignity of stable housing. Thank you for your consideration.