

Submitter: Ann Turner
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Housing and Development
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB54

SB 54 Right to Cooling Bill
Hearing: Wednesday, March 19th at 1:00 p.m.
Senate Committee on Housing and Development

Good afternoon, Chair Pham, Vice-Chair Anderson, and members of the Committee,

My name is Ann Turner. I am a retired physician and Co-President of the Board of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility (Oregon PSR), an organization that works to protect human life from the gravest threats to health and survival. For more than 10 years I have been a volunteer with Oregon PSR's Healthy Climate Action team.

I am writing in strong support for Senate Bill 54 that requires landlords of more than 10 dwelling units to provide cooling if outside temperatures reach over 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Heat kills. No other weather-related disaster in the US kills more people annually than excessive heat. One study published in 2020 estimated that the annual death toll from heat is 12,000 persons. Figures from the CDC reveal that 159 excess deaths occurred in Oregon during the five-day heat dome in 2021.

Heat kills through direct effects like heat exhaustion and heat stroke, through exacerbation of pre-existing conditions like cardiovascular disease and respiratory conditions, and through indirect effects. Among the latter are the rise in homicides, accidents and drownings that often accompany a heat wave. Considerable morbidity also results from excessive heat. Adverse effects include heat rash, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, heat stroke, heart attack, stroke, acute and chronic renal failure and more. The Oregon Health Authority estimated that 500 persons in the state were treated for heat-related illness during the 2021 heat dome.

According to Multnomah County's "Health Impacts of Excessive Heat Events" report, lack of air conditioning was a key driver in mortality. We also know that exposure to consecutive days of heat with limited overnight cooling is a main factor that makes people more susceptible to heat-related illness. Those most susceptible to the impacts of excessive heat are the elderly, infants, pregnant women and those with underlying health conditions, especially BIPOC communities that have a greater burden of chronic illnesses.

We believe that we must prevent what we cannot cure and this bill is a preventive measure.

I strongly urge you to pass SB 54 out of committee. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Ann Turner, MD
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