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**Senate Committee on Housing and Development
Testimony in Support of SB 54
March 19th, 2025**

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

The Oregon Law Center (OLC) is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to achieving justice for low-income communities in Oregon by providing high-quality civil legal services. We advocate for our clients and support policies that promote safe, healthy, and equitable living conditions.

We write to express our strong support for Senate Bill 54, which mandates the provision of indoor cooling or access to cooling spaces for residential tenants, particularly in multiunit buildings with ten or more units. This bill is a critical step toward safeguarding the health and well-being of Oregon's residents amid rising temperatures and increasing occurrences of extreme heat events.

Health and Safety Considerations

Current Oregon law lists heating, but not cooling, as an essential service and condition of habitability (See ORS 90.100 and ORS 90.320). However, lack of access to cooling in extreme heat poses significant health risks, especially to vulnerable populations such as the elderly, children, and individuals with pre-existing health conditions. Prolonged exposure to high temperatures can lead to heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and even death. Oregon's heat extremes are on the rise, and in 2024, [OPB reported](#) that Oregon experienced a significant heatwave that led to at least 14 suspected heat-related deaths between July 5 and July 10. These fatalities occurred across several counties, including Multnomah, Washington, Jackson, Klamath, Linn, and Coos. As our state's conditions have changed, so too should our definitions of essential services required for habitable conditions. By requiring landlords to provide effective cooling methods, SB 54 ensures that tenants have a safe refuge during periods of excessive heat, and will prevent illness and fatalities.

Equity and Accessibility

Low-income households often lack the financial resources to install or operate cooling systems, making them disproportionately susceptible to heat-related illnesses. SB 54 addresses this disparity by making cooling an essential service, thereby promoting equitable access to safe living conditions for all tenants, regardless of their economic status.

Implementation and Support

We acknowledge that implementing these requirements may pose challenges for some landlords. However, the phased implementation timeline, accompanied by agency information and support, and special provisions for landlords with less than 10 units take those challenges into consideration. SB 54 provides landlords with ample time to plan and adapt to these necessary changes.



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Conclusion

SB 54 is a vital piece of legislation that prioritizes the health, safety, and dignity of Oregon's residents. By ensuring access to adequate cooling, we can prevent heat-related illnesses and fatalities, promote equity, and enhance the quality of life for tenants across the state.

We urge the Committee to support SB 54 and recommend its passage.

Thank you for your consideration.