To: Members of the Senate Committee on Housing & Development
From: State Representative Maxine Dexter, M.D., House District 33

Date: February 2nd, 2022

Subject: SB 1536

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Anderson, and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Dr. Maxine Dexter, State Representative for House District 33, encompassing NW Portland and NE Washington County on the indigenous lands of the Cowlitz, Clackamas, and Grand Ronde. I am grateful for this opportunity today to testify in strong support of Senate Bill 1536, a renters right to cool.

My district includes the zip code 97209, and during our 2021 heat dome event this area suffered the highest number of heat-related deaths in the state. It is my duty, as the state representative for this community, to speak up as a strong advocate for this bill. As a pulmonary and critical care physician who cared for multiple people in the intensive care unit who died tragic deaths as a result of heat stroke during this period, it is my obligation to do whatever I can to prevent such senseless death in the future.

We have good reason to believe that having access to air conditioning would have prevented the majority of lives lost in the 2021 heat dome event[1]. I know from first-hand experience the enormous cost to a person, their family, their community, that heat stroke has. I cared for multiple people who were healthy one day and in the ICU the next suffering with fulminant multi-organ failure. These people didn't make it home and their major risk was simply falling asleep in a room without any ability to cool off.

I will share the personal story of one of my patients who has given me permission to do so with the statement, "If it helps people like me stay alive, I want them to hear it." I care for this gentleman in my lung clinic as he has a severe case of a lung disease called COPD, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary

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[1] Templeton, A. (2021, July 13). "Multnomah County: Lack of air conditioning was a prime factor in heat-wave deaths". *OPB.*
https://www.opb.org/article/2021/07/13/portland-oregon-heat-wave-deaths-air-conditioning/

Disease. On a normal day his ability to walk and be active is limited by his breathing issues. When the weather is hot, things get much worse. He is in his 70s and lives alone in a low-income housing unit in Old Town. His building, built in the early 1900s, has many floors and is considered a "walk up" building. His single-room apartment has a shared bathroom down the hall. He has small windows, and no air conditioner. He has a hard time walking up and down the stairs to get in and out of his apartment building on a good day. During the heat dome event, on June 28th 2021, he could barely muster the strength to walk to the bathroom down the hall, let alone to go down the several flights of stairs to get out of the building to wait for a bus to take him to a cooling shelter. He was struggling to breathe and knew he was in trouble. He had a fan on, wet towels on his bare chest and went to sleep, not sure he would wake up.

The cost of supplying air conditioning for these at-risk families is miniscule compared with the cost of further inaction. Days and weeks in the ICU, exacerbated chronic health conditions, children who lost working parents; the economic and personal costs are enormous. We must acclimate to the reality that our climate is changing and build resiliency to handle it while we address the root cause. I am clear this bill will save lives. Importantly, the lack of access to cooling is an equity issue - people with limited incomes can't simply decide to go buy and run an air conditioner. There was a disproportionate impact of heat-related injury and mortality on low-income Oregonians. We must take action urgently to protect these members of our community, patients like mine, from suffering again when the next heat event occurs.

I strongly urge your support for Senate Bill 1536.

Sincerely,

Representative Maxine Dexter, M.D.
House District 33 (NW Portland and NE Washington County)