

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Megan Howard. I am a second-generation owner of Tandem Property Management, a local, family owner, operator and developer of apartment communities in the Portland metro area. I am testifying in support of HB 4120A.

This bill is about health, safety, and housing stability—for residents and for the people who provide housing.

I want to share why this matters. In November 2023, a fire was ignited on the wood balcony attached to one of our apartment homes where the individual had admitted to smoking shortly before the fire. The fire spread through the apartment building we own and manage. Eight homes were destroyed and were rendered uninhabitable. Eight families lost their housing and belongings just weeks before Christmas. Some had lived with us for six years. One family had a five-year-old child. I was on site and watched in horror as the firefighters contained the fire, keeping it from spreading to other nearby, occupied apartment homes.

It is important to note that this community was already relatively smoke-free. Smoking indoors and within ten feet of the building was prohibited at the time of the fire—and yet this still occurred.

Thankfully, no one was injured—because our on-site maintenance supervisor ran toward the fire, knocking on doors, and 30-ish firefighters responded quickly. But the damage was done.

The housing impact was severe. Those eight homes were offline for more than two years during a time of acute housing insecurity. That is eight fewer homes available in our community—homes that took years to restore.

The financial impact matters too. The resident responsible didn't have renter's insurance. While we were insured, rebuilding took years. During that time, we experienced reduced rental income from those homes, yet we still had to pay employees, utilities, taxes, and insurance premiums. This fire could negatively affect our insurance rates moving forward, as providers prefer a claim-free history and may increase premiums—or decline coverage altogether. We should be able to absorb that increase, but many local housing providers cannot. When owners can't absorb these costs, housing supply suffers.

Passing this bill is a start towards keeping residents, their belongings and housing providers safe. If possible, I would be advocating for a smoke-free apartment community all together. We already have language in our leases prohibiting smoking in apartment homes and within 10 feet of the building. But as evidenced here, that doesn't deter people. Often, we have repeat offenders that we can't hold accountable because of the ways the existing

laws are structured. Every time this lease violation occurs, the residents, their neighbors and the greater apartment community is put at risk. Had the law been different at the time of this fire, the repeat offenders referenced in this story may not have had the opportunity to destroy a building and the lives inside it.

HB 4120A helps reduce this risk. It gives multifamily housing providers a clear, lawful path to adopt nonsmoking policies for existing residents with advance notice and reasonable protections, including respect for fixed-term leases. As amended, the bill strikes a fair balance: it prioritizes resident health and safety, reduces fire risk, and helps keep homes online—without forcing people out.

This incident displaced eight families, consumed emergency resources, and removed much-needed housing from the market. Passing HB 4120A is a practical step you can take to protect residents, preserve housing, and support responsible housing providers across Oregon.

Thank you for your consideration!

Megan Howard