



HOUSING SENIORS | CREATING HOPE | PILOTING CHANGE

June 15, 2021

Members of the House Committee on Rules
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for SB 278-2

Chair Smith Warner, Vice-Chair Drazan, Vice-Chair Holvey, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony on behalf of Northwest Pilot Project, in support of the -2 amendments to SB 278.

Northwest Pilot Project is a nonprofit social service agency that serves people aged 55 and older experiencing housing instability and homelessness in Multnomah County.

We strongly support SB 278-2, which will provide urgently needed protection from eviction for vulnerable renters in Oregon who have applied for rental assistance and need additional time for these payments to be received by landlords.

We believe that every Oregonian deserves a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home, and we appreciate the critical action the Legislature has already taken to extend the grace period for tenants who are still unable to pay back owed rent due to COVID impacts. But when the statewide eviction moratorium ends on June 30th, renters who are unable to pay July rent and are making efforts to obtain financial assistance can still be evicted.

Many vulnerable older adult tenants are working ceaselessly to regain stability and reconnect with employment and other income supports that abruptly disappeared when COVID restrictions went into effect. However, the statewide reopening process has only just begun.

Oregon has hundreds of millions of dollars in new rent assistance available, but delivering this unprecedented level of resources to vulnerable renters in need will take more time. Meanwhile, July rent is due in two weeks.

Since the early 2010s, service providers across the continuum of care have seen a visible increase in older adults experiencing homelessness. This cohort of older adults has increasingly fallen into homelessness for the first time at age 50 or older, and they are more likely to have a disabling physical or mental health condition.¹

¹ The Emerging Crisis of Aged Homelessness (2019), Dennis Culhane, PhD et al. <https://www.aisp.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Emerging-Crisis-of-Aged-Homelessness-1.pdf>

An analysis by the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies of weekly Census Pulse survey data in 2020 showed that “among older adults, the pandemic has had a disparate impact on households headed by a person of color and lower-income households.”² A higher rate of Black, Latinx/Hispanic, and other households of color reported lower or no confidence in their ability to cover their housing payment compared to white older adults.

The US Census Bureau’s Census Pulse survey for the week of May 12 through May 24, 2021 showed that among respondents aged 55-64 living in rental housing, 41% stated they believed it was somewhat or very likely that they would be evicted from their home in the next two months.

For low-income seniors, especially those remaining in the workforce or supplementing meager social security benefits with part-time work, staying safe and housed has meant counting every penny and wading through a complex network of COVID-19 emergency resources.

Unfortunately, too many are realizing that though they qualify for help, this assistance will not arrive in time to pay July rent.

Social service providers are processing an unprecedented amount of requests for eviction prevention dollars, but without immediate legislative action, people with applications pending will slip through the cracks.

Please support SB 282-1 to provide additional protections to struggling tenants who have applied for rental assistance and are doing all they can to remain safe in their homes.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Marisa Espinoza
Public Policy Coordinator
Northwest Pilot Project

² “Making Rent in the Pandemic: How are Older Adult Households Faring?” <https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/blog/older-adult-households-and-the-economic-impacts-of-the-pandemic>