



# community alliance of tenants

February 13, 2022

Chair Dexter, Vice-Chairs Gamba and Helfrich, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Community Alliance of Tenants (CAT) please accept this testimony in strong support of HB 2001. We urge swift passage of HB 2001 as a bipartisan, bicameral bill that brings parties and people together as a step forward in addressing the housing crisis in our state.

HB 2001 is an important element of the emergency response to our current housing crisis. The bill ensures a focus on youth homelessness prevention, provides innovative approaches to addressing housing supply barriers, and contains critical measures to help prevent eviction-caused homelessness due to eviction statutes designed for displacement instead of stability.

CAT is a membership-based statewide association of over 6000 tenants. We educate and empower tenants to demand safe, stable, and affordable rental homes. We believe that housing is the basis of a strong community. So we bring tenants together to organize and collectively advocate for fair and equal protections in housing practices and policies.

## **Prevent Evictions:**

We are particularly writing to urge support of Sections 14-26 of HB 2001, which contain essential and reasonable improvements to Oregon's eviction statutes to promote stability and payment rather than displacement and eviction. These Sections of the bill:

- Expand the time after a notice of nonpayment before being taken to court from 72 hours to 10 days.
- Provide that nonpayment eviction notices and court forms should include information about where to find rent assistance and legal assistance, and provide access to translation of these forms.
- Amend first appearance and trial timelines to ensure that tenants have a greater chance of finding help before their hearing.
- Provide that an eviction case will be dismissed if payment is made before final judgment.
- Make the default judgment process more fair.
- Streamline the eviction sealing process for those who qualify for sealing, removing a procedural barrier to future housing stability.

Considerable time protections are available for property owners to prevent their displacement in times of economic hardship. These proposed protections and expanded timeframes nudge us toward more comparable protections.

## **Reduce Unsheltered Homelessness and Increase Housing Supply:**

We also support sections focused on reducing unsheltered homelessness and increasing housing supply because all strategies are needed to create stable communities:

- Expanding investments in youth homelessness prevention, prioritizing services for school-aged children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families.



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- Gives authority to allow the Governor's recent Executive Orders relating to homelessness to apply to the whole state, removing the current barrier to this application.
- \$20 million in grant/loan funds, for the construction of low cost modular housing in wildfire affected areas and for low and moderate income households.
- \$3 million in seed financing for the construction of affordable workforce rental housing.

People are living on the edge financially. According to the state economist, more than 50% of Oregon renters do not have enough money left over for food, medicine, basic necessities.

Most of the thousands of calls CAT are from tenants that are trying to retain their housing but are experiencing a temporary struggle that forces them to choose between life essentials such as food, housing, childcare, medical treatment, and transportation. Once a tenant has received an eviction notice we have only three days to help someone find a solution. In three days, it is nearly impossible to find rental assistance, secure an attorney, and deliver the rent before the right of the tenants to have their rent accepted expires. Many programs for rent assistance will not qualify a tenant until they have received a notice, compounding the issue.

By lengthening the notice period to ten days and making the default judgement process more fair there is a better chance for that tenant to retain their home. It takes time to find and offer assistance so it is especially important that tenants and social service agencies have time to connect with people at risk of eviction.

People at higher risk of eviction are people who do not speak English, and People of Color that have faced history of disparities in access to living wage incomes.

Communities of Color, immigrants and refugees already facing historical and systemic barriers to jobs, housing, health care, opportunity and wealth are paying an unfair price for Oregon's unfair and rushed eviction laws. For example, on average, landlords filed evictions against Black women renters at double the rate of or higher than their white renters in Oregon and in 16 other states, according to the ACLU's Women's Rights Project and Data Analytics team.

During the last two years, the ten-day notice period and other COVID period tenant protections made for more positive outcome. We saw that in the dip in evictions. The benefits of preventing an eviction and stabilizing the community are passed on to everyone; the tenant, the landlord, the community and government. Now that the notice period has reverted to three days the number of evictions are climbing.

This year, CAT will assist approximately 100 households defend their rights in court. We know that having an attorney greatly increases the likelihood of a tenant remaining housed. With time to secure an attorney, tenants were able to defend themselves in cases where landlords had received rent assistance but choose to evict anyway, misapplied fees, or no cause evictions.

In closing, passage of HB 2001 will enhance our capacity to respond to youth homelessness, create innovative approaches to addressing housing supply barriers, and provide reasonable and critical measures to help prevent eviction-caused homelessness. The bill is landmark legislation and reflects the urgency of the crisis too many Oregonians are living with due to lack



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of housing, inadequate services, and eviction statutes designed for displacement instead of stability.

Thank you to the legislature and to Gov. Kotek for your fast action on this package to help our communities respond to the crisis of homelessness and to improve stability and safety for individuals and families across the state.

Sincerely,

Kim McCarty  
Executive Director  
Community Alliance of Tenants