



Oregon Law Center

Becky Straus
Managing Attorney
Eviction Defense Project
T: 503.473.8322
bstraus@oregonlawcenter.org
522 SW Fifth Avenue, Suite 812
Portland, OR 97204

**Senate Committee on Housing and Homelessness
Testimony in Support of SB 611
March 27, 2023**

Chair Jama, Co-Chair Anderson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Becky Straus and I am the Managing Attorney of Oregon Law Center's Eviction Defense Project, which is a joint program of OLC, Legal Aid Services of Oregon and Center for Nonprofit Legal Services. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 611.

As you know, the Eviction Defense Project provides free legal help to low-income tenants who are facing eviction in every county across the state. We also watch the eviction filings daily and have aggregated a large amount of data about eviction rates, types, details and outcomes.

Nonpayment of rent is, by far, the most common reason for eviction and displacement statewide. On average, more than 86% of eviction cases filed in circuit court each month are "nonpayment cases."¹ Extreme rent increases are a common reason for the nonpayment. If we want to address our growing homeless crisis, we must engage in eviction prevention efforts that support rent-burdened tenants.

Our team of attorneys and paralegals works every day to meaningfully serve our low-income clients and advocate for their housing stability through the eviction court process. They bring a frontline perspective on eviction and displacement, including how extreme rent increases are fueling the homelessness crisis. Our attorneys report that the vast majority of their clients have received at least one rent increase each year of their tenancy. Many of those increases are for the maximum amount allowed by state law. This year, that allowable increase was unexpectedly high. And in many buildings where there is no cap, tenants faced extreme increases. These kinds of increases are impossible to plan for, which leads to nonpayment of rent evictions because many tenants just cannot afford the rising cost of their rent.

Our attorneys share these stories of their clients:

- MT is a low-income, black, single mother and works hard to support her son, who is living with a disability. Her rental unit enjoys the rental cap exemption for newer construction, so she endured multiple rent increases that she could not afford. When she moved into her apartment in December 2019, her monthly rent was \$1,627. By 2021, her

¹ Data comes from OLC Eviction Defense Project review of publicly available circuit court eviction filing data. More complete data provided in testimony from Sybil Hebb, Oregon Law Center, in support of SB 611 and submitted for this March 27, 2023 hearing.

rent increased to \$2,440 – a 50% increase. In January of 2022, it increased again to \$3,463.23 – a 42% increase. MT was lucky to access one-time, emergency rent assistance to resolve her eviction court case, but she and her children were eventually displaced from their community.

- AA is a single mother of 3 children. She has a physical disability, but works hard to earn enough to support her family. Even so, the consistent rent increases this client received from her landlord made the premises no longer affordable. Eventually, she was in court facing eviction because she couldn't keep up. We helped her avoid a judgment against her, but she was eventually displaced because the situation was unsustainable.
- PC has lived in her unit for 6 years with her husband and 3 kids. She is Spanish-speaking, recently had back surgery and is living with cancer. After frequent rent increases every 6 months, they family could no longer afford the rent and ended up in court for nonpayment of rent. They know they need to move, but don't know where to go. We worry for their safety as they are displaced into the risk of homelessness.

SB 611 is a critical piece in the state's response to homelessness and will have a hugely beneficial impact on our clients. We urge your support.

Thank you.