

Senator Jama, Senator Anderson and Members of The Senate Housing and Development Committee,

My name is Shannon Shaffer, and I am a housing provider in Senate Districts 4 and 7. I am here today to testify in opposition to SB 799.

We need to pause for a moment and ask if going backwards will allow us to move forward. I would argue that we need not repeat the COVID era restrictions on notices, providing additional time for application review when we know that we need to fix the system before placing more restrictions on housing providers and asking them to shoulder the burden of a lack of available housing and affordable housing.

As Oregonians we should be asking ourselves, what is causing this housing crisis? Some of it is the change that occurs over time and political positions being far right or far left. What we need is a bipartisan resolution passed to provide rental assistance for those who need it and increase supply of housing. This will do two things it will ensure the security of housing for those who are struggling, who are currently housed. The second is new building and rehabilitation of properties that offer both conventional and subsidized housing. If we tackle these problems together first then we will have a foundation to build plans, programs, and future regulations.

You may be asking yourself; how do we keep Oregonians that are struggling housed? Increasing rental assistance available for Oregonians will give several struggling renters a chance to apply for the assistance. To let you in on our best practices as housing providers; we want renters to apply for assistance and receive it. The whole of the funding should not be shouldered by the state. We should work on creating a permanent assistance program to help our citizens who are struggling to pay rent by working with the federal programs to encourage more affordable housing in Oregon.

Contrary to the narrative that we see about housing providers, we want more housing available, and it is not for financial reasons. We all could tell you stories about interactions with Oregonians who need affordable housing and struggle to qualify for a unit for a number of reasons. Many of these renters are our own neighbors, friends, and family. Yet, we are not increasing support to the development of additional units that Oregonians desire, Housing Choice Voucher Program, Affordable Housing Projects, and other programs that we know work. In addition, we have not created additional programs to address lack of decent, safe, and healthy housing for citizens who are high level offenders who have done their time or are transitioning from homelessness to housed.

What I am getting at is that there are so many issues surrounding the housing crisis in Oregon it is not going to be resolved by adding more regulation. For this bill to provide up to 60 days to a renter who hasn't paid rent, for any reason would be a bad regulation. What I have found in the last round of COVID rules we had two outcomes. First, we had the renters that did everything in their power to make sure that if they did qualify for assistance try to get it. In most of those cases it worked out. On the other hand, we have renters who for several reasons want more time or knowingly are trying to play the system for additional time.

In my recent professional experience, I have seen properties that have been left in deep distress due to damages that occurred between the end of the notice period or moratorium period for non-payment and when we receive possession back post Forced Eviction Detainer. A lot of times there are damages caused by renters that think they are making things harder for the housing providers sometimes they are worried about an issue being renter caused so they omit a maintenance request during this period and those renters that have nowhere else to go and may not be in the best life position at the time.

What follows is phone calls with ownerships many of whom have one duplex, or a couple of houses; these properties are part of their retirement plans who had money set aside for a regular turnover who are faced with thousands of dollars of repairs to make it decent, safe and healthy for the next renter. Even apartment owners are feeling the squeeze from the covid era regulations and the subsequent turnover of those units by putting off upgrades in amenities, smaller projects or issues they had planned to focus on bringing the FED apartments back to rental condition.

I would ask that you consider todays testimony and table this bill to focus on creating a rental assistance program that can handle the volume of Oregonians using it and get payments out in a reasonable time frame. Focus on securing an ongoing funding source that will support the rental assistance program long term and not disproportionately impact Oregonians. Work with local leaders and municipalities to expand our stock of rental housing supply and encourage federal programs to invest in affordable housing programs throughout Oregon, not just metro areas.

I cannot emphasize enough that regulations on housing providers is not going to resolve the problem, it is going to kick it down the road for someone to revisit. My question is why not be the committee that makes real measurable change by collaborating with all parties to resolve our housing crisis and provide a road map for other states to follow.