Submitter: Sarah Hughes

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Housing and Development

Measure: SB611

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Anderson, Members of the Committee,
Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of SB 611. My name is Sarah Hughes and I am a single woman and a special education teacher with Portland Public Schools living in Portland.
We strongly urge you to pass SB 611 as a critical homelessness prevention strategy, to protect seniors, families, individuals and communities across the state from extreme rent increases.
I grew up in apartments with parents who rented. I have not yet owned a home. Last year my rent increased over $400 when I moved from a one bedroom apartment to another - one newer building to an older building. I am a public servant who just wants to live on the city I work in and support. I am fortunate to make a good living wage, and I am terrified of future rental increases. It is so stressful to live in so much fear.

Four in 10 Oregonians rent their homes and they already pay the ninth highest rent in the nation. The statewide stories of massive rent increases in communities large and small show that we have a rent crisis that must be addressed. Whether these increases are hitting entire buildings or mobile home parks or individuals, each and every one puts people at risk of displacement and homelessness.
SB 611 is an action that the legislature can take now to have an immediate impact on our state's housing crisis as we also work on the longer term solutions of increasing supply and providing support to rehouse our currently homeless neighbors.
Here is the problem we are facing. Under current law:
2023 rent increases for properties 15 or more years old can be as high as 14.6%.
That is too high for anyone to afford, outpacing wages and Social Security.
There are no limits at all on rent increases in buildings 15 years or newer.
When people have to vacate due to no fault of their own, Oregon's tight and expensive rental market makes it hard to quickly find a new home.
SB 611 would:
Limit rent increases to 3% + inflation with maximum increase of 8% during a calendar year.
Narrow the loophole, applying rent stabilization to buildings older than 3 years, which increases the number of people protected while exempting new construction.
Increase relocation assistance to three-months' rent to help tenants displaced through no fault of their own avoid homelessness. Landlords with four units or less are exempt from this provision.
Set no limits on rent resets between tenants.
The rent increase reports from across Oregon show the great need for SB 611.

Studies show that just a $100 increase in median rents in a community is tied to a 9% increase in homelessness in that community. At a time when Oregon is experiencing some of the highest rates of homelessness in the nation, we cannot afford to let rent spikes go unchecked. A reasonable rent limit will help prevent high-rent home loss and prevent our state's homeless crisis from getting worse just as we are all pulling together to treat it as the emergency that it is. The legislature did the right thing in passing the first rent limit in 2019 but as we have all learned now, the limit did not account for runaway inflation.

We know these extreme rent increases are not isolated incidents.This reasonable proposal prevents extreme rent increases and displacements, while allowing landlords to take inflation into account and preserving the ability to reset rents to market rates in between tenancies.

Oregon's housing emergency goes beyond lack of supply and the number of people living without homes or shelter. We have a rental emergency as well, with tenants living just one rent increase notice away from displacement and possible homelessness. Without SB 611 to stop runaway and extreme rent increases, we will continue to see people displaced onto the streets more quickly than we can rehouse people. Without passage of SB 611, Oregon's success in addressing this crisis seems impossible.

Sincerely,
Sarah Hughes