



April 1st, 2021

Chair Jama, Vice-chair Linthicum, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to SB 327. SETA is a non-profit dedicated to empowering tenants in our community. Our free Tenant Hotline educates tenants regarding their rights and protections and connects them with local resources. The data we collect from the hotline has proven to be an invaluable tool in gleaning information on the struggles tenants are facing at the ground level.

One of the largest problems we are seeing in Lane County is the alarmingly frequent attempts by landlords acting in bad faith to skirt or even blatantly ignore housing law. This is most evident in the number of fraudulent evictions taking place, which has been one of the very top reasons tenants call our hotline for nine of the past twelve months. We will soon be releasing our Hotline Caller Report which outlines that our Hotline has received an 87% increase of eviction-related calls compared to last month.

We are glad to see that SB 282, which you passed out of committee earlier this week, takes steps to clarify the penalties for breaking the law. We are concerned that SB 327 does the opposite and *weakens* the penalties. On page 3, lines 13 through 15 of SB 327, the amount landlords must pay when they fail to comply with the law is changed from one month's rent to three times the amount wrongfully charged to the tenant for utilities. To explain this a bit further: the average rent in Eugene is about \$1,200 per month. Utility costs may vary but we imagine they may total several hundred dollars, at most. Even when tripled, we are confident that the charge for utilities will not come close to the amount paid in rent. The effect of this, then, is that the penalty for breaking this law will be substantially lowered. Contrary to some of the testimony you have heard today, housing laws are not always violated out of ignorance or neglect. There are landlords who take advantage of the housing system and penalties like those that SB 327 seeks to reduce are a critical deterrent to abuse and predatory violations of housing law.

SETA's Board of Directors recently voted unanimously to urge the Senate Committee on Housing and Development to reject SB 327. At a time when there is a demonstrable trend of landlords increasingly flouting housing law, we should not be considering proposals that would make it even easier to do so. If this concept is brought back in a future legislative session, we hope this provision will be changed and we are open to working with the supporters of the bill to take these



concerns into account. We understand that the proponents of the bill did not seek out nor incorporate feedback from renter organizations in its drafting but we hope that will change if it is brought back in a future session.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity for members of the public to provide comment and insight regarding this legislation. Please see the accompanying Hotline Report that we are also submitting to the record, which demonstrates some of the issues I have discussed with you today including deliberate violations of housing law. As always, please do not hesitate to reach out if the Springfield-Eugene Tenant Association may be at all useful in your efforts.

Respectfully submitted,

*Timothy Morris*

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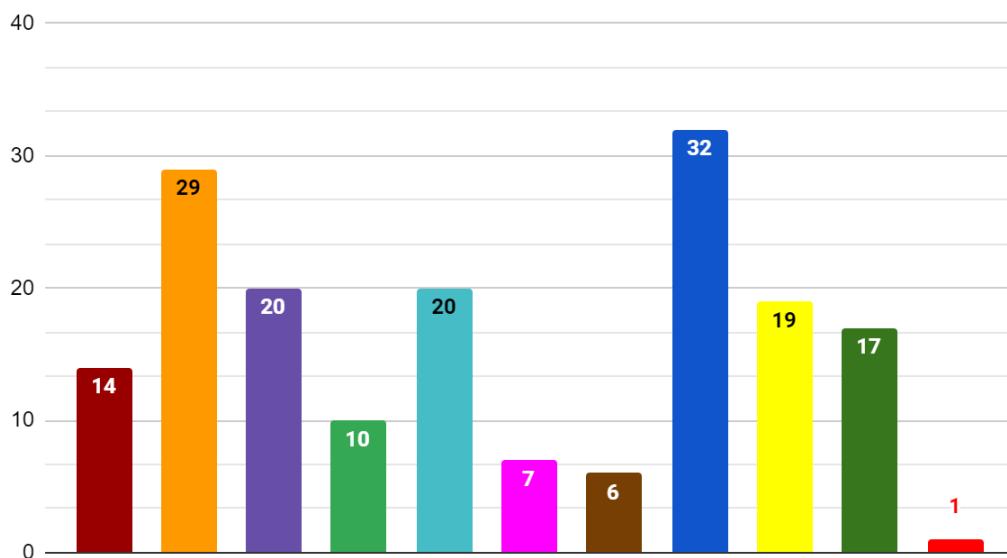


#### Mission Statement:

Springfield Eugene Tenant Association (SETA) is a 501c3 non-profit, public service organization that is dedicated to renters' rights and interests. We accomplish our goals by assisting, educating, and empowering tenants in the Springfield-Eugene area. We believe that housing rights are human rights and that affordable and accessible housing are the foundation of any strong community.

## SETA Hotline Update March 1st - 31st 2021

Approximate Number of Calls in Top Categories\*



#### For Cause Eviction - 14:

Mainly 30 day notices for lease violations. Some report eviction notices for unpaid rent without the landlord including a copy of moratorium and declaration.

#### No Cause Eviction - 29:

Many callers expressed concerns for no-cause evictions during the eviction moratorium, specifically 90 day notices. Many report the 90 day "for landlord reasons" notices are retaliatory or unjust. Many accounts of no-cause notice after giving the landlord a declaration of financial hardship.

#### Late Rent/Rent Assistance - 20:

Type of call was very rare before the pandemic. Many callers report loss of income and inability to pay back rent.

#### Landlord Entry/Right To Privacy - 10:

Many callers, often elders and/or at risk continue to express concerns and fear of people entering their homes. Most report entry because the landlord is selling the property without notifying tenants.

#### Other Tenants/Neighbors - 20:

Wanting a roommate to leave, SDV situations, and neighbor harassment against protected classes reported.

#### Rent Increases - 7:

Reports of improper rent increase amounts and notices, including cases of raised rent as a retaliatory action by the landlord after asking for repairs in good faith.

#### **Deposits/Fees - 6:**

Concerns about cleaning fees, improperly kept security deposits, lease break fees, and having to pay for ordinary wear and tear repairs, specifically plumbing.

#### **Habitability/Repairs - 32:**

Tenants concerned about repairs not being made by landlords, especially during the pandemic. Many tenants reported multiple serious repair issues with no landlord resolution. Mold, weather proofing, and infestation are top repair issues during the rain season.

#### **Discrimination - 19:**

Based on self reports we have heard from people with disabilities, elders, voucher holders, families with children, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ persons, and survivors of domestic violence who are experiencing discrimination. Most of these callers reported retaliation and harassment by landlords.

#### **Rental Agreements/Applications -17:**

Concerns about language of rental agreements and applications. Many report having no formal rental agreement.

#### **Reasonable Accommodations - 1:**

Tenants with disabilities questioning their rights for reasonable accommodation requests.

\*Approximately **117** total calls answered, however, the sum is higher because calls frequently cover multiple issues.

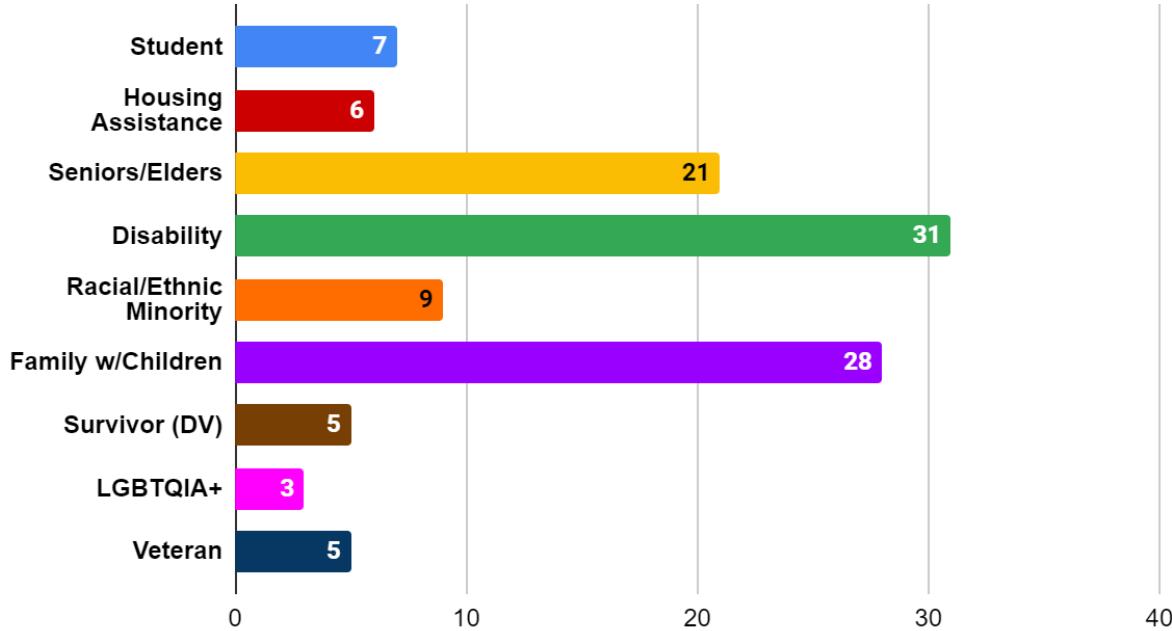
## **Demographic Information**

#### **Who Calls In?**

Household demographics represent both asked and self-qualified statements from callers. Often, demographics are co-occurring like housing assistance and families with children, seniors/elders and disabilities, etc. Although we do ask, some callers prefer not to give personal demographic information.

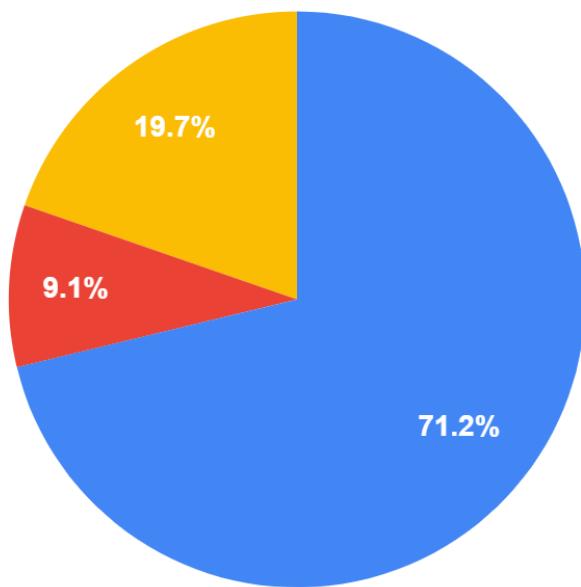
That being said, our data shows overrepresentation of people in vulnerable communities.

## **Demographics**



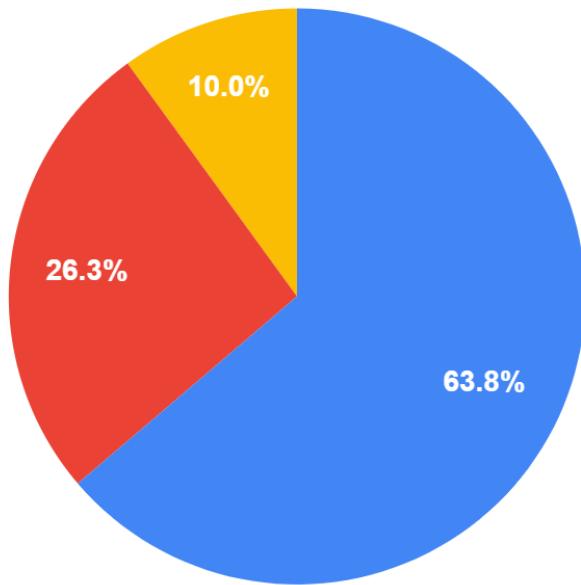
## Household Income

● 0-125% FPL   ● 125-200% FPL   ● Over 200% FPL



## Location

● Eugene   ● Springfield   ● Outside Metro Area



## **Report and Partial Analysis from Hotline Manager**

For the month of March, 2021 we have witnessed an 87% increase of callers experiencing no cause and for cause evictions. I am heartbroken in reporting this. It is beyond worrisome to repeatedly see members of our community forced out of their homes, many of which have been renting those homes for years, some decades. By and large, seniors/elders, people with disabilities, and families with children are being evicted with 90-day no cause notices through no fault of their own. During a housing crisis, in a global pandemic, these callers are reporting that they will end up houseless as finding suitable, affordable housing in 90 days is almost impossible.

Even with the rise of for cause evictions, we are seeing that most if not all of these tenants were given improper notices, time frames, and outright wrong information. For example, a survivor of DV with disabilities and a young child was texted a 48 hour notice to move out, after giving their landlord a signed declaration of financial hardship.

Another caller, again with disabilities and a young child, is being forced out of their home of many years with a 90-day no cause notice. Time is running out on the notice, the landlord will not give them an extension, this person has limited mobility and is now afraid they will become houseless before they are able to secure housing. They received the notice so the landlord's adult child could move into the property. Again, they have been peaceful tenants and have had no complaints or issues in the past.

In the period covered, 38% of our calls mentioned COVID-19 and pandemic related issues as major concerns. Last month, 41% of callers mentioned concerns related to the pandemic. Since the beginning of the pandemic, public unemployment data suggests the vast majority of the unemployed in Lane County are in low-earning sectors of the economy.

As the pandemic continues, calls requesting rent assistance or questioning landlord entry are more common. A large portion of these calls come from elders and/or people with disabilities afraid of contracting COVID. Other callers have reported constant inspections and lease violation notices from landlords that appear to be discriminatory in practice. We received a particularly disturbing report of a landlord giving a tenant a 24 hour inspection notice, but instead of the landlord arriving a realtor came with potential buyers for the house. These tenants were not informed that their home is for sale.

Calls about rent assistance, no cause evictions, discrimination and retaliation, and habitability/repairs continue to be our largest categories. In fact many of the habitability concerns come from elders, people with disabilities, and people on housing assistance programs (like Section 8). We are also seeing an increase in discrimination and harassment complaints; notably from BIPOC communities, the LGBTQIA+ community, and people who have or care for those with disabilities.

As the pandemic continues, more callers are contacting us in a state of crisis. Thankfully, we have many resources in the community besides SETA (CAHOOTS, Whitebird, SASS, etc) to assist people experiencing a crisis directly in these unprecedented times. Our goal is to continue to provide resources and information to tenants while gathering data to show trends in our community at large.

In a final note, I would like to personally thank all 28 of our hotline volunteers; without whom this service could not be possible. The information, resources, and emotional labor they give to our community is a beacon of light in these dark and trying times. From the bottom of my heart, I thank each and every one of you.

With questions contact:  
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