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We believe that everyone deserves to live a life free from violence.

Testimony in favor of SB 278

Protect Rent Assistance Applicants from Eviction and Ensure Distribution of Federal Dollars

House Rules Committee

Monday, June 14 at 1:00 PM

Dear Chair Rep. Barbara Smith Warner, Vice-Chair Rep. Christine Drazan, Vice-Chair Rep. Paul Holvey, Rep. Daniel Bonham, Rep. Julie Fahey, Rep. Andrea Salinas, and Rep. Jack Zika,

Thank you for so quickly responding to the unprecedented situation facing Oregon. We are all concerned about the crisis of homelessness that our State is currently suffering and no one wants to make it any worse. On behalf of Raphael House of Portland, and of domestic violence survivors who are working every day to find or maintain safety and stability, I urge your support of SB-278 - giving these individuals and their children more time to ensure hope for a home without abuse.

At Raphael House, we believe that everyone deserves to live a life free from violence. We have been a safe haven for survivors of domestic violence fleeing abuse for more than 40 years, and we proudly help families find the long-term safety, stability, and independence they deserve—while also working to prevent future violence through education. This past year alone, our programs reached more than 3,273 survivors and community members throughout the Portland Metro area.

Financial abuse affects 99% of domestic violence survivors and has lasting impacts that can include ruined credit, debilitating debt, and sabotaged career paths. Not only does a survivor have to start over after escaping a dangerous partner, but they have to dig themselves out of financial liability incurred by this abusive person. This can have particularly dire outcomes in relation to housing – forcing survivors to make the impossible decision between potential homelessness and returning to or staying with an abusive partner.

The eviction moratorium has offered necessary respite for these families during the pandemic, as survivors grapple with not only the impacts of interpersonal violence and trauma, but also this global crisis and the added challenges of isolation, job and wage loss, lack of childcare, and more. However, when the moratorium ends on June 30th, there will be no protections for those who cannot pay rent after July 1. Earlier legislation passed by this Legislature will give tenants time to pay back rent, but there are no grace periods for people who cannot pay rent on or after July 1.

There is money available, and that is why we must take steps now with Senate Bill 278 to protect individuals and families – including domestic violence survivors statewide – who have applied for rent assistance from eviction, while their applications are pending.

Oregon has significant federal dollars available for rental assistance to cover up to 12 months of back rent and three months of current and future rent. Under this bill, a tenant who provides their landlord with documentation that they have applied for rent assistance may not be evicted for nonpayment for

60 days. This will allow time to help ensure that rent assistance payments reach the landlord. The bill ensures stability for women, men, and children who are already struggling, while getting resources into the hands of landlords.

The past year's pause on evictions has given domestic violence survivors and their children an opportunity to stay safe and stable through the crisis caused by COVID-19. We have seen the direct impact of this on hundreds of survivors we support every day at Raphael House, who've had their dreams upended by the pandemic and had to quickly adjust to protect themselves and their families. To undo that now and end the moratorium will jeopardize the hard earned homes these families have risked to build. We urge you to support SB 278 and give them, and our State, a chance to recover.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emmy Ritter".

Emmy R Ritter, LCSW
Executive Director
Raphael House of Portland
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