community alliance of tenants

March 12, 2025

Re: Support for SB 54

Chair Pham, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kim McCarty, and I serve as the Executive Director for the Community Alliance of Tenants (CAT), Oregon's only statewide, tenant-led renters' rights organization. I submit this testimony on behalf of CAT and the thousands of renters we support through our hotline, workshops, and advocacy. For years, our tenant leadership has identified the right to cooling as a fundamental health and safety concern.

We strongly urge you to support SB 54, because it is a common-sense solution to a growing public health crisis of heat-related death that can prevented through access to cooling.

Surprisingly tenants do not always have control over cooling in their homes. While the right-to-cooling policies adopted in Oregon have helped, we know that it doesn't help people who do not have the resources to buy an a/c unit and get it installed, and landlords can sometimes prohibit a tenant from doing so.

We need SB 54 because Oregon is growing hotter and heat is the deadliest natural hazard. Oregon has a high rate of heat deaths per population compared to other states. Oregon ranks third in heat deaths, behind Arizona and Nevada.

Seventeen people died of the heat in Oregon last July and 100 died in the 2021 heat dome in Oregon. The number of deaths could be higher because heat deaths are massively undercounted. We are especially concerned about our elderly. Heat disproportionately harms older people. The average age among those who perished in the 2021 heat dome was 70. and we know these deaths could have been prevented with access to cooling.

SB 54 will make cooling a component of habitability in rental dwellings so that more Oregonians including the elderly and low-income tenants have access to life-saving cooling. We urge you to protect the health of all Oregonians by supporting SB 54.

Sincerely,

Kim McCarty
Executive Director
Community Alliance of Tenants
kmccarty@oregoncat.org