

Department of County Human Services



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204 SW 4th Avenue
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House Committee on Housing and Homelessness
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Support for House Bill 4123

Dear Representative Marsh, Senator Campos, and members of the House Committee on Housing and Homelessness:

On behalf of the Multnomah County Department of County Human Services, I am writing to express support for HB 4123.

By protecting tenants' confidential information and authorizing statutory damages for affected individuals, the passing of this bill would offer an important new level of legal protection for Oregon's 640,000 renter households. This is a huge cushion in the fight against unstable housing.

These protections couldn't be more timely, considering close to 90 percent of people who experience homelessness were tenants, not homeowners, before losing their place, and Oregon continues to struggle with levels of homelessness that are far higher than the national average. Sadly, our state has some of the highest rates of youth and family homelessness in the U.S., particularly in the Portland metro area.

Our neighbors who rent are much more likely to experience poverty or face homelessness than homeowners. Oregon renters are disproportionately members of racial, ethnic and minority groups, and/or immigrants, and Latine and Black renters are much more likely to face an eviction filing than white peers. More than half of Oregon renters are rent-burdened, spending more than 30 percent of their income on rent.

When, after an eviction or leaving a rental apartment, their information can be shared without their specific written authorization, they may be more likely to struggle to rent or re-rent, and may even become homeless or return to homelessness.

This bill's language contains specific provisions that protect subpopulations of renters, including immigrants, people with disabilities, domestic violence survivors/victims and membership of other already-established Oregon protected classes. This is crucial for many reasons, including:

- Sharing information about protected class status increases the potential for illegal housing discrimination. Fair Housing testing and tenant complaints to the Fair Housing Council of Oregon demonstrate that discrimination continues to prevent equal access to housing opportunities in our state.
- Nearly half of immigrants rent (versus a third of U.S. citizens), and 90 percent of newly-arrived families rent.
- Oregonians with disabilities are more likely to be renters than those without a disability.
- A significant percentage, possibly even the majority of people experiencing homelessness have physical, mental or developmental disabilities.
- Domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women trying to find safety. Sharing this information can not only potentially affect the acceptance of a survivor's application for future housing, it can put them in danger.

When there is no law forbidding, nor penalty for, the unauthorized sharing of confidential information such as Social Security number or other government identifiers, immigrant legal status, disability or the assertion of rights under the Violence Against Women Act, a renter's ability to bounce back into stable housing may be adversely affected.

Perhaps the most important aspect of HB 4123 is that, by establishing statutory damages for violations, this bill has teeth: a built-in potential pathway and safety net for tenants whose information has been disclosed to pursue financial recompense.

Multnomah County strongly urges you to pass HB 4123. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony and for your service to Oregon communities.

Sincerely,



Rachel Pearl
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