



AFSCME Support
For HB 2372

March 2, 2021

Dear Chair Fahey, Vice-Chairs Campos and Morgan and Members of the Committee.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide support for HB 2372 a bill to help address housing insecurity by prohibiting no cause evictions.

Oregon AFSCME Council 75 represents around 24,000 members in a variety of employers both public and private. We represent employees of some of the state's housing authorities and many other locals who work with or support people who are vulnerable and face housing instability which includes people worried about evictions without cause. Our behavioral health members know that without stable housing, it is difficult to focus on treating mental health or substance use issues effectively. Our early learning and child care members can tell you the impact on children when they know their parents are worried about where the family will live if they are evicted - especially when there isn't always a clear reason and the stigma of poverty already weighs heavily on their little shoulders.

Portland State University's Homelessness Research & Action Collaborative (HRAC) highlighted in their February 2021 report that the potential costs of evictions when the moratorium expires in June could be upwards of \$3 billion. When you look at what is not included - "lost income, increase in public assistance, gaps in education, or the long-term impact to health, education, and earnings" the true and long term costs quickly compound and will have deep impacts on the individuals already at risk and the already strained services that many AFSCME members provide through their work.

While the "gaps and long-term costs in education" that the report does not take into account may not make you think of our early learners, it is easy for those in child care who care for children 6 weeks to 12 years old and early learning professionals that I work with to draw the connection. They see how worries and stress carried by adults in children's lives can create the need for more intensive services for little ones who may not be able to articulate their feelings or simply don't understand that stress. Their worry and stress can present itself through developmental or behavioral issues that parents, child care providers and early learning professionals need additional supports to address. In addition to hours of training, the supports



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can be as simple as a few visits from early intervention specialist to work with parents and providers to come up with a support plan. Or it can turn into regular visits and additional staffing for the provider and additional supports for the family. It doesn't take long to see how the stress of housing insecurity for a family quickly costs all involved directly or community wide when we could simply take steps that support keeping people housed and reduce the amount of toxic stress too many families are experiencing.

In 2019, Charlie Peirson, a public defense attorney and AFSCME member with Local 2805, Multnomah Public Defender provided this support for SB 608 that highlights some of the costs that the PSU HRAC report do account for:

“...getting evicted or priced out of your home doesn't always mean police contact or criminal charges. That said, the Oregonian reported that in 2017, the 3% of Portland residents without houses accounted for 52% of arrests and 84% of those arrests were for nonviolent offenses. I represent hundreds of people each year who have no stable, legal place to sleep, bathe, or live their lives as we do behind closed doors. The loss of housing disrupts the basic patterns of a healthy, prosocial life, and can turn everyday private struggles into public problems.

Homeless people get arrested for trespassing, often because of where they sleep or because they got on public transportation without fare too many times. They get arrested for drinking in parks or for having an open beer can on a sidewalk, shouting in public, or putting up a tent in the wrong place. “Tumultuous behavior,” shoplifting, and shoving matches. I've seen people arrested for protecting their property, for having the drugs they take to stay awake at night, and for answering nature's call. They get arrested for being a nuisance. I recently heard a Portland police officer say that if they come talk to a person three times “you're getting arrested.”

Most of my homeless clients eventually miss a court date. They oversleep. They get injured, they get sick, they have loved ones whose welfare comes first. Often, the safest place they can sleep is far from the courthouse. Court documents get stolen, lost, or ruined by rain. A missed court date means another arrest. The average stay, the Sheriff says, is 10 to 15 days.

Homeless people get arrested for things that wouldn't happen if they had a home. They get arrested for things they'd have a right to do in their own home. They get arrested because they are messy and their messes are upsetting. They make us uncomfortable.

A home is more than just a legal place to sleep. It's a refuge. It's a place where we can keep ourselves and our lives in order and a place where we can shut the door when we need to be



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messy. Home is where we recover. To put it simply, housing instability creates petty crimes and unnecessary arrests and makes it harder to move through the criminal justice system smoothly.”

Sadly, I could go on for quite some time sharing the impacts housing insecurity has across our public services. As I have been checking in with our members over the last few weeks about the bills that you all are working on this session the most consistent request - no matter where they work has been - “Can we just get people housed and keep them housed? If we do that, their other needs are easier to address.”

Oregon AFSCME urges your support and passage of HB 2372.

Respectfully,

Eva Rippetteau
Political Coordinator
Oregon AFSCME Council 75
erippetteau@oregonafscme.org