

Chair Jama, Co-Chair Linthicum, members of the Committee,

My name is Maro Sevastopoulos, I live in NE Portland, and I am NOT a renter -- I am a landlord.

I live in the home my spouse owns, and I rent out the single-property house + apartment I bought before we met. I have worked hard in the last 5 or 6 years to keep rent low and stable. During the early parts of the pandemic, I worried that one or both of my tenants would be among the now tens of thousands of Oregonians who rent and have struggled financially, and I reached out to my tenants to offer any necessary relief.

There is no question that buying property to rent out (all or a portion) is a gamble that property owners make, and it's one I made consciously at a different time in my life. Today, this property is a placeholder, waiting to see if my family moves here and to provide housing when they do. But as a property owner, I am not in the same situation as my tenants. I may be concerned about getting the mortgage paid, but that's part of the risk I took – that isn't the same as the immediate fear of losing housing.

I can – and will continue to -- offer support and flexibility to my tenants; I am writing in strong support of the Oregonians who aren't getting that from their landlords and rental management companies. Many renters need more time to pay back rent; it will be impossible for all of them to be caught up by July. We need to ensure that renters get the protection they need against any COVID-era dings on their credit & rental history; we must provide protection from the many landlords and management companies who would retaliate against struggling renters. We need to ensure the ability to share housing when necessary, without risk of eviction or contract violation during an emergency.

Of deepest concern to me, is the disproportionate effect the pandemic has had on marginalized populations. Mothers who work outside of the home, Black folks, Indigenous folks, People of Color, and frontline workers have borne the economic brunt of the pandemic -- they are most likely to have lost income, are more likely to rent vs own their homes, or are more likely to have contracted COVID. We cannot leave these folks behind as we try to move Oregon forward.

In closing, Oregon's renting families have hung on this long. We cannot take away their lifeline now. The legislature promised Oregon renters that they wouldn't lose their homes during the pandemic. I hope you will keep that promise and I urge you to pass SB 282-1.

Thank you for your time,
Maro Sevastopoulos, Portland