

To Chair Jama and Senate Committee on Housing and Development members

My name is Michelle “Chella” Reinichen. I am a life-long renter and have resided at Dawson Park Apts. in Portland, OR. since March 2006. I write you in support of SB 611, which addresses the critical need for rental stability in our state.

I am a proud shared leader and member of Dawson Park Tenants Committee, made possible by mentored guidance though Portland Tenants United, one of many organized groups in support of this bill. This proposal will limit annual rent increases to 3% plus CPI or 8% whichever is lower, provide protections for all buildings over three years old, and increase relocation assistance in no-fault evictions. In addition, it will provide much needed relief to renters who are struggling to make ends meet in the face of rising rents and limited resources.

I discovered my apartment home in my late twenties after graduating from the Art Institute of Portland. I was told my income at the time was within the building’s guidelines and my application was accepted. I honestly wasn’t sure what that meant at the time. I was just ecstatic I was approved for this specific unit due to the floor plan. I am reliant on the use of my manual wheelchair 100% of the time since 1997. A 30 ft. fall resulted in a spinal cord injury am now paraplegic. That said, finding a space that fit my needs took a long time with countless this’s and that’s deeming them inaccessible for one reason or another.

When I moved into Dawson Park Apts. in March 2006 my rent was \$625.00 a month. As of March 2023, my rent is \$1033.00 a month for the same apartment. This building is owned by Home Forward, where section 8 is available. In my 17 years of residency I’ve gone from fully employed earned income with growth potential to currently being fully reliant on a predetermined fixed income and food benefits. Even though I am required to complete a yearly recertification I do not receive any rental assistance. My monthly rent amount is more than half of my monthly income and is increased as often and as much as the law will allow. I never get a chance to save the money I need to move. Social Security Disability is my only income and that is too much to qualify for Oregon Health Plan, which make my out of pocket costs for prescriptions and provider care that’d otherwise be covered unaffordable. That said, my monthly income vs cost of living does not afford me anything really. I have to apply for financial assistance constantly in order to receive certain care, medications and equipment that aren’t “life dependent” but greatly improve my quality of life. About half of those requests get denied.

I have survived several medical anomalies including a pulmonary embolism, sepsis, a coma/pneumonia related partial lung removal, a glioma brain tumor the size of “a small grapefruit” in my right frontal lobe, plus multiple spinal cord injury related setbacks including broken and fractured bones, severe wear-and-tear on my shoulders, elbows, wrists, hands, and fingers to name a few off the long list since my fall 25 years ago. I had to stop working full time in 2010 and most recently due to medical setbacks have had to forego adaptive sports activities and all volunteer work. But dang all! I am still alive and putting forth my best efforts to dust myself off, keep my chin up, and keep trying to give and get the most out of this human-on-planet-Earth existence.

Steep increases in rent only adds to our biggest problems instead of solving them. Even though this proposal is not enough to stabilize rents. With an 8% annual increase rent will still double in 9 years. Passing SB 611 is better than the 2023 14.6% rent increase the current law allowed. The burden of housing insecurity due to skyrocketing rental rates isn't limited to just myself, it affects everyone including but not limited to one's overall well-being mentally and/or physically, families, seniors, disabled, and low-income renters throughout the whole state of Oregon. . I see it every day every single place I go in and around Portland. Heartbreaking! Raising rents are not the answer. It will only create more problems for us.

I can only hope and urge Oregon legislators to support SB 611. Oregonians need solutions that recognize having access to safe, stable, and affordable housing is a human right and make the decision to ensure that. Thank You.

Sincerely,

Michelle "Chella" Reinichen