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Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 282: Tenant COVID-19 Recovery

4 March 2020

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and members of the committee,

Working with over 150 congregations, organizations, and interfaith partners, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) strives to envision communities of faith in ministry together creating a more peaceful, just, sustainable, and compassionate world. EMO works to improve the lives of Oregonians through housing and other direct service programs, dialogue and advocacy.

EMO is in strong support of passage of SB 282: to ensure protections for tenants impacted by the COVID pandemic.

EMO's support for ensuring protections to keep Oregonians in stable housing stems from both our commitment to justice as well as our experience operating four housing-related programs for marginalized communities. As a community of faith, we proclaim that our state has a moral imperative to keep our neighbors in housing through supportive services like those provided in SB 282. **The bill will stabilize renter households, and ensure that there is time for state and federal rent assistance to reach landlords and resolve back rent debt, preventing countless Oregonians from experiencing houselessness.**

Now more than ever, we must also prevent houselessness to combat the injustice of systemic racism in Oregon's housing market. Our Black and Brown neighbors are at the greatest risk of lifelong harm from the COVID evictions. Discriminatory housing policies have made homeownership difficult and inaccessible, leaving people of color at higher risk of rental evictions even as higher rates of COVID exposure are leaving people ill and economically stressed. For example, according to the U.S. Census Pulse Survey, 30% of Black renters are at risk of eviction because of concerns they can't pay next month's rent.

The eviction moratorium was essential in helping renters stay safe and stable in their homes, but we need more time to help people pay thousands of dollars in back rent or to apply for rental assistance. At current rates, the state won't be fully vaccinated by rent due date of June 30th and our economy will likely remain in partial shutdown. If renters can't go back to work, they can't pay their back rent. **EMO believes in standing firmly alongside our neighbors who will struggle to pay back rent, including the up to 16% who are estimated to have fallen behind.** With dim prospects for recovering lost income, renting Oregonians need more time to stabilize their families. We must ensure that people have time to access to assistance, and aren't unfairly evicted after the moratorium ends.

We call upon the legislature to take this important step in supporting Oregonians as we navigate COVID recovery.

Thank you for your work and consideration of this essential legislation.

Olivia Asato

Public Policy Associate

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon