



# Portland Housing Bureau

Mayor Ted Wheeler • Director Shannon Callahan

## Rental Services Commission

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April 8, 2019

Mayor Ted Wheeler and Portland City Council  
Portland City Hall  
1211 SW 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Portland, OR 97204

### Subject: Rental Registration Fee and Rental Services

Mayor Wheeler and City Commissioners,

The Rental Services Commission (RSC) forwards our recommendations for a Rental Registration fee structure and for rental services funded through a registration fee. The RSC did not take up the questions of whether to have a registration fee, or regarding the amount of a fee. Understanding interest from the Mayor and Council to fund the work of the Rental Services Office through a registration fee, the RSC considered what fee structure and services should be included as part of those conversations.

Fee Structure – The RSC recommends that a registration fee be structured {add language accordingly}

Services – It is necessary for any new Registration fee to be accompanied by additional services to show the value being added from fee revenue. The City's existing rental services provide crucial support across the rental housing relationship, but do not meet the substantial need for services among vulnerable populations. As a result the RSC recommends continuing to fund current services and allocating additional funding for an expanded Landlord training, expanded culturally-specific Tenant assistance, and a voluntary mediation program.

A full breakdown of the RSC's recommendations around fee structure, and accompanying services is provided below.

#### Fee Structure

{add language accordingly}

#### Recommended Services

Following a robust conversation regarding service needs, the RSC identified expanded Landlord training, expanded culturally-specific Tenant assistance, and a voluntary mediation program as three high need priorities.

##### Expanded Landlord Training

In November 2017, the City of Portland suspended its Landlord training. Housing providers historically relied on this free training to learn about laws, best practices, and resources relevant to their business. This training was particularly valuable to small scale landlords who are unable to access more robust training. It is crucial to bring this training back as soon as possible and to expand its scale drastically. The RSC discussed, but did not reach consensus on whether a Landlord training should be mandatory.

In its last iteration, the training scale is insufficient to teach landlords about fair housing, state landlord-tenant law, Portland renter protections, safety, resident relationships, and more. The RSC recommends a substantial increase in funding above the prior level of less than \$50,000 a year. The RSC also recommends that the Landlord Training be moved into PHB's Rental Services Office.

##### Expanded Culturally-Specific Tenant Assistance

In 2017 the Community Alliance of Tenants (CAT) and the Portland Housing Bureau began a pilot of culturally specific tenant assistance through CAT's Tenant Protections Team. Through CAT's partnerships with culturally

specific organizations, the pilot's goal is to increase accessibility to legal services and tenant support specifically for low-income tenants and fair housing protected classes who are persistently underserved by these services.

There continues to be sustained need among members of protected classes accessing tenant assistance. The organization partnership model of providing services has become a best practice for the Portland Housing Bureau as seen most recently in the RFP for additional Fair Housing assistance. The RSC recommends a substantial increase in funding for Culturally-Specific Tenant Assistance to better reach underserved renters.

### Voluntary Mediation

Both housing providers and renters face difficulty in resolving rental housing disputes. For-cause evictions, frequently for unpaid rent, lead to court appearances to set a payment plan or move out date. In these cases, housing providers and renters frequently find themselves navigating the legal system on their own or, if they are able, paying for legal representation.

A voluntary mediation program coordinated by PHB's Rental Services Office could offer housing providers and renters an opportunity for third party mediation to help them reach agreements outside the legal system. Both parties would be assisted without extensive legal expenses and renters could potentially avoid an eviction on their record thereby reducing future housing barriers. The RSC recommends funding a voluntary mediation program to be coordinated by PHB's Rental Services Office.

### **Conclusion**

There is significant sustained need both among housing providers and renters. As Council determines a fee to fund existing Rental Services and staff the RSC recommends Council allocate additional funding for the new services outlined above.

Sincerely,

Katrina Holland  
Co-Chair

Christian Bryan  
Co-Chair