



## Rental Services Commission 2021 Public Testimony Compilation Topic: Tenant Anti-Harassment

### JANUARY

#### Speaker 1

- Wanted to speak to raise awareness and support for the Tenant Protection Ordinance (“TPO”).
- Seeking to put teeth in protection of tenants from harassment. Incidents of harassment have increased due to landlords being more frustrated with the moratorium and greater tenant protections.
- Speaker has been subject to harassment by landlord. Knows first-hand about misinformation and bullying by their landlord. Speaker has been assisting tenants who have received no-cause notices and notices for nonpayment of rent that are prohibited during the moratorium.
- TPO addresses reduction in the quality of housing and services, invasions of privacy, bullying, misinformation, enforcing rules that weren't enforced before, and construction projects. Violation would result in fines.

### FEBRUARY

#### Speaker 1

- Member of PTU Organizing Committee. Wants to bring attention to tenant harassment and constructive eviction as an important issue right now. Harassment has increased since the pandemic.
- Urge RSC to add TPO to Work Plan and build a Rental Services Office that has a more protective role in addressing tenant harassment.
- Cities like Santa Monica and Berkeley have already adopted similar ordinances.
- According to recent survey of 188 renters, 30% owe back rent and 22% have experienced harassment from their landlord, 30% said maintenance has not been done, 17% reported amenities have been reduced, 16% reported rules have been enforced that were not previously enforced, 14% have been asked when they can pay back rent, and 14% have been bullied physically or verbally by landlord. Most tenants wrote letters to their landlords or sought help from RSO or Legal Aid, and only 3% reported that this resolved their issue.

#### Speaker 2

- Resident of KBMHP. Purchased home and moved in within 60 days of receiving notice of park sale.
- Being forced to move will decimate everyone in the park, especially those on fixed incomes. Speaker cannot afford to move home and there's no parks that will take it because it's over 20 years old.
- Residents made an offer to purchase that was not seriously considered by the owner. Recommends Tenant Opportunity to Purchase and First Right of Refusal: When residents made offer, the owner already had redevelopment permits submitted by developer that would eventually become the owner. There were no good faith negotiations.
- Recommends meaningful notice: owners should be required to notify MHP residents as soon as building permits are submitted. Similar notification requirements exist for neighbors and

neighborhood associations but not the actual people facing displacement. Residents were not notified of any proposed changes to the park until they received the park closure notice.

- Recommends meaningful resources: City should provide resources to help residents move their homes. Residents should be fairly compensated for the true costs of a park closure.
- Recommends Anti-Harassment protections for tenants/residents.

#### Speaker 3

- Lives at the St. Francis building downtown. Was homeless prior to obtaining voucher in 2016.
- Would like RSC to look at the anti-bullying and harassment policies and expand these policies for people with disabilities especially mental health disabilities.
- Has experienced harassment for two years since moving in involving both maintenance staff and landlord. Speaker was warned prior to moving in, that landlord was famous for turning away and driving out families. Speaker has 7-year-old child. Harassment entails enforcement of rules that were either not in place before or not being enforced against tenants that cannot pay their rent. Speaker has been harassed by noise complaints when management is aware that child is autistic. Maintenance request taking way too long to respond to.
- Today the power went out and did not have safety light in stairwell. They live on 7<sup>th</sup> floor. As speaker and child were ascending stairs, maintenance staff came out to harass them rather than assist getting upstairs safely.
- More people will end up on the street because conduct is driving people out of speaker's building because there is not protection against harassment of this nature.

#### Speaker 4

- Lives off NW 23<sup>rd</sup>. Has never been late with rent.
- On October 2, 2020 speaker heard new owners of building in the vacant unit next door. Owners had a conversation about upcoming demolition work the next day and their intention to convert entire building to Airbnb. Speaker heard owners state that they would encourage tenants to leave but that they were sure the construction would cause tenants to move out.
- Plumbing was regularly turned off without notice. Same for electricity. Speaker has been harassed through the walls and on the street. Called slurs related to sexual orientation and threatening remarks related to political affiliation.
- Construction work starts as early as 6 a.m. and has gone as late as 1 a.m. Construction is happening in unit above, below, and besides speaker. Dumpster has been located outside speaker's window.
- Speaker has asked for repairs and received a one-word email in response that said "nope."
- Living situation has caused disruption in sleep and paranoia because they do not know when they will be there and what will happen when they are there. The situation has impacted mental and physical health and work performance. Speaker had a mental breakdown and has had therapy session mocked by landlords or agents of landlord.
- Tenants need anti-harassment protections.

#### Speaker 5

- Tenant organizer and advocate and former RSC commissioner. Testified regarding the situation at Kelly Butte Manufactured Home Park and need for BDS to notify PHB and/or tenants directly when redevelopment permits are applied for. City should have an anti-displacement plan in place and protections and resources at the ready so when tenants receive such notices they are not confused and misdirected. City needs to step in and explain what is happening, what tenant's rights are, and provide meaningful resources.
- Also need to adopt an anti-harassment ordinance. Instances of harassment during COVID have increased.

#### Speaker 6

- Speaker is a renter living in buildings that has experienced constructive evictions. There has been selective harassment of some tenants and selective enforcement of the rules. Targeted fines and looking for creative for-cause termination for people actively in community organizing.
- Tenants found out about building being sold by stumbling on it online. Speaker is worried about affordability of building may change and/or that they may expand and build more units.
- Speaker would like more guidance toward how to create a stronger voice for ourselves as a community.

#### Speaker 7

- Renter in the same building as previous speaker.
- Within two days of new owners taking over, they began demolition of four empty units and the basement. Notified landlord of damage to the walls and ceilings in unit as early as November 2nd. They reduced plumbing services and tenants are no longer guaranteed running water anymore. Landlord has refused to fix things until after move out.
- Landlords issued a termination notice and then took it back two months later saying it was ineffective.
- Landlords have locked tenants out of the basement which is where laundry and storage is.
- Landlords are trying to get tenants to leave. Commission needs to create protections for tenants addressing what is happening at speaker's building.

### **MARCH**

#### Speaker 1

- Moved into Sandy Studios in 2015. It was supposed to be a remodeled unit. Remodel was done haphazardly and was not finished when speaker moved in (no toilet seat, cabinets were not stained, carpet was ripped, etc.).
- Pest control problem (rats, roaches, and bed bugs). They have had exterminator come one or two times but do not keep up with regular treatment. Speaker killed 15 rats in one day with snap traps which speaker purchased because landlord refused.
- Ongoing need for repairs including a hole in the bathroom ceiling for eight months, poor wiring, roof caved in and exposed black mold. Multiple repair requests have gone unanswered. Landlord is "putting a band-aid on a bullet hole" by doing roof patches and covering up black mold. Speaker does repairs for neighbors that do not have heat or running water.
- Landlord trying to get them to move into a shelter but they refuse to go. Manager has had a van he was temporarily using towed when they knew it was his. Landlord refuses to give them money to move and has not mentioned mandatory relocation assistance at all.

#### Speaker 5

- Organizer at PTU and is working with tenants at Sandy Studios since August.
- 60% of residents still have no idea what is going to happen to them as no one is telling them about the future plans.
- Do Good Multnomah, the managing agent of the housing, needs to make decision on how to remedy situation quickly. Conditions at the building are unbelievable.
- Unfair for tenants to go into temporary housing when they need permanent place to live. Many residents have complicated medical issues.
- Tenants want transparency and to know what the next steps are for them.

#### Speaker 6

- Resident at Sandy Studio. Interested in getting money to help people living there.
- Put in request for Reasonable Accommodation in November and landlord denied it. Doing everything they can to “emasculate us and make us feel inferior.”
- Speaker was subject to severe physical threat by abusive ex-partner in front of manager and manager did nothing. Ex-partner came back two days later and did exactly what she threatened. Landlord still did not kick her out and she lives two doors down.
- Larger issues at the building include elevator not accessible by residents, did not have lock on door for three months, no sink in unit, and mailbox has been broken into.

#### Speaker 7

- Speaking about Sandy Studios and deplorable conditions including cockroaches and some units without heat in the winter. They let landlord know about the need for repairs and nothing gets done.
- No case management provided at housing despite representations that management is providing this service.

### MAY

#### Speaker 1

- Speaker supports extending the moratorium. Speaker is opposed to any means testing for services or protections which has a horrible history and is going to make the process more complicated.
- Would like to see a way for landlords who are not helping the people impacted by pandemic held accountable.

#### Speaker 2

- Speaker watches evictions in Portland regularly. Moratorium allows ample opportunities for landlords to remove tenant that does something horrible. Landlords have enjoyed opportunity for the state to pay for rent arrears for months and have not used them. Know this because have heard countless tenants whose landlords pursued illegal nonpayment evictions.
- A universal eviction defense would be a lie if we do not guarantee the right.
- State provides ample space for landlords to attack tenants physically and mentally to help them self-evicted. Speaker was helping a tenant who made 6 tiny drill holes and landlord nearly assaulted this person. This is a regular occurrence in the work the speaker does. We must protect people.

### SEPTEMBER

#### Speaker 1

- Organizer with PTU. Have been developing the Tenant Protection Ordinance for a few years.
- Tenant organizers and renters know that harassment is a big issue and has increased in severity with the pandemic. Want to make sure that this stays on the Commission’s radar. Have secured support from Commissioners and need Commissioner Ryan to introduce this for a hearing and a vote.
- Protections target bad faith behavior and harassment behavior from landlords to tenants. Similar policies already exist in about ten cities in California.

#### Speaker 2

- Support PTU’s Tenant Protection Ordinance. Topic is worth the time and attention of RSC.

### OCTOBER

#### Speaker 1

- Volunteer organizer at PTU.
- Speakers wants to acknowledge how upsetting it is for people to tell their stories of harassment as living these experiences is traumatic. Harassment is demoralizing and sometimes ends in self-eviction, which is an eviction.
- Tenant Protection Ordinance is a policy solution. It is molded after virtually identical ordinances in other cities. First anti-harassment ordinance enacted in 1996.
- A Portland state university study from July 2020 found 20% of all renters and 32% of all BIPOC renters reported harassment from their landlord.
- Ordinance proposes a robust budget for the Rental Services Office, so tenants have accessible resource for support when they face this troubling experience.

#### Speaker 2

- Lives in subsidized housing. About three years ago made a reasonable accommodation request that was denied. Speaker filed a HUD complaint. Speaker filed a federal lawsuit and has been harassed ever since. Annual certifications used to never be a problem and now they are not going to renew lease. That is retaliation.
- Speaker read that City has an ordinance on reasonable accommodation, but it has no enforcement for it. Speaker's health would not be as bad as it is now if folks on a local level intervened and put a stop to this nonsense.
- Trying to age in place and not go through harassment. Fighting against a large landlord with money to fight with attorneys. Speaker does not have money to fight with attorneys.
- Speaker had to go through BOLI to get a parking space. Every week speaker comes out and there is a car parked next to theirs and blocking access to their car.
- This could have been resolved a long time ago and hope that Commission will think about this and "get your own thing going."

#### Speaker 3

- Retired schoolteacher and widow. Rents a small house in back of a large house occupied by the landlord. Speaker had to repeatedly remind the landlord that speaker needed to be home whenever anyone come into rented home. Documented two illegally entries into home. Landlord threatened many times by pounding on the door, yelling, and giving speaker the finger once when there were lots of neighbors out. Speaker felt publicly shamed.
- Landlord raised the rent when speaker applied for rent assistance. Rent was raised from \$1,000 to \$1,500 and landlord began to take away services such as wi-fi, turned off the water outside of home so could not water plants, cut off half of the electricity, and put a lock box on the breaker box. Landlord shamed speaker about applying for rental assistance and speaker experienced emotional trauma not knowing if landlord's verbal threats were going to turn into physical violence.
- Called the police and police told speaker to get in touch with PTU and speaker has been volunteering there ever since.
- Speaker has not been able to resolve these issues even though the rent increase and the lock on the breaker box were illegal. Attorneys said they were too busy with people who were being evicted. Speaker felt like they were being evicted.

#### Speaker 4

- Testifying on behalf of PTU's Tenant Protection Ordinance.
- Lifelong renter. Once speaker became low-income, harassment become unconscionable. We know bullying is wrong, but it is even more wrong when it happens in home sanctuary because one has nowhere that they can go to escape.

- Speaker had a landlord that tried to hit her. When landlord decided she wanted her out she violated speakers' rights repeatedly.
- When speaker lived in Gresham with boyfriend, they started charging more rent even though income went down, and the rent was supposed to be 30% of household income. Landlord ignored letter from legal aid and documentation of decreased income. Landlord leaned on boyfriend, so he eventually kicked speaker out
- Currently living at Milepost 5. Landlord issued a violation notice for a crime that speaker was not even present for and there was no proof. Landlord refuses to remove it from speaker's record. Six months later speaker got another one for a cockroach infestation in unit when speaker has never had cockroaches. Notices probably because speaker is tenant organizer.
- Acknowledge that violations happen on both sides, but one side has profit and privilege and the other does not.
- The Tenant Protection Ordinance is well thought out and comprehensive to protect all renters including the most vulnerable. These protections exist in other cities for a reason.

#### Speaker 5

- President of organization that employs 6 people and a renter. Speaker wants to make an appeal to their own value to society.
- Landlord has subjected speaker to harassment. Has suddenly removed mailbox and wifi, both provided through the lease. Landlord cut off power. Landlord got drunk and yelled verbal abuse through the walls while blasting the same song on repeat. Next day, landlord aggressively pounded on the window while holding lawn maintenance equipment while speaker was sitting inside. Speaker did not feel safe.
- Speaker vacated before the rental agreement was over out of fear for personal safety. That came with personal and professional costs. Speaker lost a month's rent and \$1,800 in security deposit from self-eviction. Speaker is only ok because they have savings, a car and a girlfriend's family that they can stay with for a few weeks while they were homeless. If speaker was less privileged, situation would be a lot worse.
- The landlords have all the chips to play. It is a business calculation. A tenant has their entire life on the line. It is not a fair game. Tenants need protection.

#### Speaker 6

- Former renter at Red Rose Center Apartments managed by CNR. Speaker suffered a slip and fall on the property and from then, harassment started. Maintenance ignored repair requests. Pictures were taken of speaker's family to intimate. Management performed three inspections, during one they took batteries out of smoke detector and left it hanging there for a year. Ignored speaker's reasonable accommodation requests. After getting a lawyer, speaker was moved to lower level as an accommodation, but unit was in poor condition. Landlord would also not change parking space to accommodation disability causing speaker to fall again and suffer physical damage.
- When they moved out, they had the unit professionally cleaned, and landlord turned around the charged them for the rug. Living there has caused speaker to suffer from harassment, caused depression, and ruining their credit. Landlord still harassing speaker after move-out by bad mouthing them to new landlord and they are not able to rent anywhere because the harassment follows them.
- Urges passage of Tenant Protection Ordinance because people like the speaker are suffering.

#### Speaker 7

- Corroborated what last speaker says about CNR. Volunteer with PTU and expresses urgent need for anti-harassment ordinance.



- Wants to rely another tenant's story of harassment who lived in a building for three years. Building was sold and new owners planned on remodeling and rebranding, which did not include current tenants. Tenant made request for repairs and landlord's answer was no. Extensive construction began and tenant were encouraged to leave. Framed photos came crashing down off walls as walls were banged on through the night. Two inches of standing water became mold. Construction contaminated water in some apartments resulting water being brown and testing at 125 times EPA standards.
- Construction workers operated at all hours and one worker unlocked the door of a tenant in the shower.
- Tenant was locked out of their storage unit. Tenants received a notice of a rent increase should they fail to move out.

## DECEMBER

### Speaker 1

- Tenant who has been having harassment issues with landlord.
- Landlord recently gave speaker a letter stating that they need to either leave the property in 90 days or sign a new lease agreeing to pay three times the rent. They sought legal advice and learned that what landlord was doing was illegal. They wrote a letter notifying the landlord that landlord's actions were illegal and would be ignoring request. Landlord came the next day and harassed them for 45 minutes. Landlord tried to enter their home through the front door and basement windows until speaker called the police. Landlord only stopped because speaker told landlord they would be filing a police report.
- Landlord has taken every opportunity to harass them and attempt to get more money.

### Speaker 2

- Lifelong renter. Since becoming a low-income artist, speaker has been living with unconscionable harassment. In the last 7 years, speaker rented a room in a woman's house and landlord was abusive to speaker and speaker's personal property. Landlord issued an illegal termination notice. On the day speaker had moved out but still had a few things at the house, landlord filed an eviction case that landlord failed to show up to for and had no intention to show up. Landlord just wanted to get something on speaker's record.
- Speaker also lived in Gresham in subsidized housing where landlord illegally raised rent.
- Currently living at Milepost 5 and was issued a violation notice for a crime committed that is completely out of character for speaker and which they had no proof of.
- Violations happen on both sides, but one side has profit, lawyers, and privilege while the other doesn't. Rights must be enforced with equally strong measures to discourage abuse. Support Tenant Protection Ordinance being passed into City law.

### Speaker 3

- Tenant who has been living in NW Portland for 3.5 years without any issues. In October 2020, the building changed ownership. The day ownership changed, the new landlords came to the property and openly discussed their plans to change the entire building into Airbnb. Landlords discussed how they were to begin construction shortly. No dates on when the work would commence nor details were given.
- Extreme demolition began in the 4 unoccupied buildings and the common laundry, storage, and basement. Noise was unreasonable and it would last for as long as 18 hours a day. No lead precautions or leaded certified contractors were used despite the fact that the building was over 100 years old.

- Individuals doing the construction harassed and disrespected tenants. They would scream at the top of their lungs every few minutes for no reason. Speaker is visibly queer and was pointed out by a worker on the street. Next day, there was extreme and rhythmic hammering on the other side of the wall from speaker's unit and the worker was repeated slurs based on one's sexual orientation.
- Landlord shared personal details about tenants including complaints tenants had made with others.
- Intensive interruptions to plumbing and water during pandemic when tenants were more often in units. Plumbing would be shut off for 8 hours a day with only one hour's notice or less.

#### Speaker 4

- Deputy Executive Director of MultiFamily NW.
- Organization has participated in a study to find out how many independent rental owners have left the market. Preliminary studies show that between 2017 and 2020, nearly 20% of the single family homeowners in the Portland metro area have sold and left the business. Realtors are hearing daily from independent rental owners wondering how they can get out of the business.
- The reasons most cited by small owners for wanting to sell are that they cannot follow the complex rules that keep coming at them. Since the pandemic we have had three huge changes in the law. FAIR is causing people to leave market. Conversation around Tenant Protection Ordinance is probably enough for an independent rental owner to say it is time for them to put their unit up for sale when their tenant gives a notice to vacate.
- Sales market is hotter than it has ever been before and independent rental owners are thinking that they can cash out and no longer expose themselves to the risks that being created.
- Anti-harassment protections created for those that are not operating in good faith. By and large, folks are operating in good faith.

#### Speaker 5

- Harassment is rampant. As tenants we feel so oppressed that we do not have the wherewithal to get the kind of support that we need.
- Speaker is a senior who lives in a HUD subsidized building. Speaker was forced out of prior apartment after 24 years due to continual rent increases. Moved into HUD apartment sight unseen and discovered it is next to a mechanical room. Noise is so grating and so annoying that I cannot sleep in the bedroom. Has notified the manager and asked if there could be a buffer between unit and mechanical room. Manager said maybe they could do something but then just ignored it. Ignoring is harassment. Speaker contacted regional manager, spoken to CAT, and was referred to a lawyer yet is still in the same position.
- Hoping that Tenant Protection Ordinance gets passed. It is essential for tenants who are struggling and have to continue fighting.

#### Speaker 6

- Tenant in the Lloyd District.
- The tenant protection ordinance is a direct response to demonstrable nationwide instances of landlords attempting to circumvent renter protections by resorting to harassment.
- Ordinance meant to correct an imbalance that landlords are exploiting.
- Speaker has had 6 property managers since COVID, none of them can respond to any pressing maintenance or safety concerns but can post a notice when the speaker is late on rent.
- Find it reprehensible that anyone would want to talk about statistics when people are bearing their soul to this Commission. People are living in constant fear. Hope Commission take into consideration the humanity of this Ordinance before anything else.