

Oregon House OKs local rent control, bans no-cause evictions in 1st 6 months

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A tenant protection bill that prohibits no-cause evictions and lifts a statewide ban on rent control has been passed by the Oregon House.

House Bill 2004 is part of a package of legislation meant to address the state's growing housing crunch.

"Oregon families are struggling against record rent increases and housing insecurity right now," Rep. Mark Meek, D-Oregon City, said during a heated debate on the House floor. "Oregon is in trouble. The rental housing market is out of balance. Doing nothing is not the answer."

The bill was amended from the original to allow landlords to use no-cause evictions during the first six months of occupancy to screen out bad tenants.

After six months, a landlord could terminate a month-to-month tenancy only for cause.

It would allow landlords to evict tenants for business or personal reasons, such as needing to make repairs or renovations, selling the unit to someone who plans to live in it, or when a landlord or family member planned to move into the unit.

In those cases, landlords would have to give a 90-day notice and provide one month's rent for moving expenses.



MOLLY J. SMITH/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Contractors work on one of the buildings at Westown Manor apartment complex in Stayton. Opponents of House Bill 2004 fear the measure would make the state's housing crisis worse by discouraging investment in rental properties and in new construction.

Small landlords with four or fewer units would not have to pay relocation costs.

The bill also would remove a statewide prohibition on local rent stabilization ordinances for residential rental units.

It would require municipalities to ensure a fair rate of return for landlords,

set up a process for landlords to request an exception to allow for a fair rate of return and exempt any new residential development for at least five years.

House Republicans argued that the bill would make the housing crisis worse by discouraging investment in rental properties and in new construction.

"I think we should let the private mar-

ket solve this shortage," said Rep. Carl Wilson, R-Grants Pass. "The sad aftermath here is so many people are raising their rental rates right now in anticipation of what this body might do."

Donna Wilson is property manager at Salem's Ned Baker Real Estate and owns four rental homes herself.

She wants people to know that most landlords are not "evil, greedy slumlords." Many are older people who own single-family homes, she said.

Wilson said she is worried because the bill doesn't define whether a "landlord" is a property management company or the homeowners it represents.

"We have clients who own one, two, three homes," she said. "If a landlord is defined as a property management company, our clients are not going to get exempt from paying relocation costs."

Many of her clients are people who could not sell their homes during the recession, Wilson said.

"Now that the economy has turned, they are more interested in selling their homes. This would penalize them for doing that," she said.

The bill passed 31-27 on April 4 and headed to the Senate.

Send questions, comments or news tips to tloew@statesmanjournal.com, 503-399-6779 or follow at [Twitter.com/Tracy_Loew](https://twitter.com/Tracy_Loew)

DHS halts 'differential response' tack

Kids being left in unsafe conditions

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The state agency in charge of child welfare services is pausing the roll-out of a strategy that aims to keep children with their troubled families and out of foster care.

The "differential response" tack of the Department of Human Services came under scrutiny following the release of an internal state report showing consultants believed child welfare case workers left children in unsafe situations almost half the time where the strategy was in place.

The report looked at 101 cases; consultants disagreed with case workers' calls about whether children were safe in 47 of the assessments.

DHS uses differential response in at least 11 Oregon counties. But DHS Director Clyde Saiki said the agency isn't going to start using differential response in any new counties until it resolves practice problems.

"If there are any safety issues with (differential response), we should pause it all together," Sen. Sara Gelser, D-Corvallis, said after DHS officials testified in front of legislators Tuesday morning. "If the safety concerns are too great to



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expand, why would we leave kids in half the state subject to a practice that has demonstrated safety issues in the assessment process?"

Child Welfare Director Lena Alhusseini called for a similar assessment to be created looking at the entire state, not just the differential response counties, though timelines remain unclear on when it will publish.

The move comes as a redesigned training effort is on the horizon for Oregon's child welfare program, offering a ray of promise when it kicks into gear

this summer. The agency's child welfare arm suffers from high turnover rates estimated to cost thousands of dollars per employee who leaves.

New training aims to reduce that turnover and uses computer-based learning and classroom work through a staffer's first year, according to DHS. It is set to go into effect at the start of July.

While Saiki said training is critical, he voiced concerns about how the agency takes care of its workers.

"I feel very strongly that unless we can solve the problem of how we support

people once they get on the job on a day-to-day basis, we're not going to break this vicious cycle," he said.

The turnover rate ranges from 23 percent to 75 percent, depending on the district, Alhusseini told lawmakers. Those rates not only hurt the agency's performance but can affect finances.

"The cost for each worker leaving the agency is \$54,000," Alhusseini said. "A third of our workforce always is new."

The staffers' exodus likely has to do with their heavy workloads and other stresses native to the job. More than half of child welfare workers last August reported high case loads, according to a survey by Service Employees International Union Local 503. The union surveyed 63 child welfare workers and represents about 2,000.

In an effort to bolster the number of foster parents able to take care of the approximately 8,000 children in foster care, child welfare is taking to the airwaves. Foster-care public service announcements are set to air on local radio and television stations from April through June.

"We want to encourage people of all ages, races, religions and genders to apply and become foster parents," Alhusseini said in a March memo.

Send questions, comments or news tips to jbach@statesmanjournal.com or 503-399-6714. Follow him on [Twitter @JonathanMBach](https://twitter.com/JonathanMBach).

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