

Affordable housing reform needed to help Section 8 work

Two months isn't a lot of time to find an apartment when landlords can discriminate against voucher holders

Justin Buri is the deputy director and statewide policy lead for the Community Alliance of Tenants. CAT is Oregon's only statewide, grassroots, tenant-controlled, tenant rights organization. CAT educates, organizes and develops the leadership of low-income tenants to directly challenge unjust housing policies and practices.

For information about your rights as a renter, please call CAT's Renters' Rights Hotline at 503-288-0130.

BY JUSTIN BURI
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

We know that when Oregon residents have access to safe, stable and affordable housing, we are not only able to better provide for the health and wellbeing of our families, but the entire community benefits as well. When hard-working Oregonians have the opportunity to live in healthy, stable and integrated communities, we can access job opportunities, keep our kids in well-performing schools and work to break the cycle of poverty that affects us all. We all have the knowledge, resources and creativity to build more inclusive, healthy, prosperous communities. Now is the time to show we have the will as well.

At the Community Alliance of Tenants, we know first-hand that there is great need for more affordable housing and resources, and where people can find housing is just as important as how much they pay. We are tenants who may have low incomes or a disability, or other barriers that limit our access to the kinds of neighborhoods and communities that Oregon is famous for. We too want safe, quiet streets for our children to learn how to ride a bike or be able to walk to the local school and get a decent education.

We know that if there is a grocery store nearby with fresh produce or a park with good shade and a playground, we can lead healthier, more productive lives. We might need a little help to get there, like education about our rights as renters, stronger protections so that we can keep our housing once we find it or a little help with a deposit, or to help us make rent each month. We aren't asking for a handout, just a little stability so we can turn around and give back to the community.

HB 2639: Improving Access to Housing for Tenants with Section 8 Vouchers

- Removes barriers for tenants with Section 8 vouchers to rent housing in their preferred communities
- Works with HUD to increase flexibility and streamlines processes, to better serve landlords and tenants
- Creates a statewide fund to provide flexible rent assistance – to provide more stability and affordability for tenants who face eviction, have lost their job, have a family or medical emergency, need help with a deposit, or simply don't earn enough to afford rent.

Tenants with a Section 8 voucher often have trouble finding a landlord who will accept it. We are given 60 days to find a landlord who is willing to accept the voucher, otherwise we lose it. Sounds like plenty of time, but many tenants who have waited three, five or more years to finally receive a voucher have lost it. We have the deposit, first months rent, solid credit, good rental history and even a reference from a previous landlord.

We search in the neighborhoods where we know the bus lines and neighbors, where we can live close to work, friends and family, and where we go to church. We are not looking for luxury, just four simple walls and a window to let the sunshine in. We look on Craigslist, in newspapers and walk the streets looking for a place to rent. Everywhere we turn, we see a similar sight "No Section 8," which means to us, "You are

not welcome here." We don't know why they would reject us before seeing our application, not knowing who we are. We are everyone: workers, families, parents, veterans, people with disabilities and people from all different backgrounds and stories to tell. Why can't we be given the same chance as every other applicant? Why can't we just be given a chance? This is what the Section 8 voucher is for – to give everyone a chance and opportunity.

Section 8 vouchers are intended to give responsible low-income tenants a choice of where they can live. When we have real choice, we have better opportunities to improve our lot and contribute to our communities in a positive way, economically, educationally, culturally and spiritually. Right now, Oregon's Speaker of the House, Tina Kotek, has introduced legislation that gives us more choice. HB 2639 will make it easier for tenants to use their Section 8 vouchers by giving everyone the same fair shot. Landlords can accept or reject the tenant using the same criteria as every other applicant.

Oregon is full of wonderful places to call home. We can all work together to ensure everyone has access and opportunity to safe, stable and affordable housing in the communities that fit their needs.

Come join our Housing Justice Rally for housing access, fairness and opportunity in Oregon, Thursday, March 14 at 11 a.m., on the Capitol steps in Salem. Any Oregon resident who cares about housing opportunities in Oregon is invited to join us. We can provide child care and transportation from Portland.

Visit www.oregoncat.org or call us for more information at 503-460-9702.

Life (?)

By Soda Pop

Life is the question why.
Life is who, where, and how.
Life is knowing that though it's getting better,
It ain't ever gonna be perfect.
Life is fear.
Life is facing your fears, and acting in courage.
Life is hope.
Life is finding something to believe in.
Life is growing up, finding that you don't want to,
And then realizing that you did anyway.
Life is wishing that you could go back.
Life is finding out there is no going back.
Life is faith, and finding people you can put faith in.
Life is chasing dreams.
Life is addiction.
Life is learning the freedom from your addictions.
Life is change when you wonder if you can handle it.
Life is finding out who you are...who you want to be.
Life is love, hate, peace, war.
Life? That's your own perception.

Exist

By Paula Ramirez

The looks, the stares, the evil glares
Do you understand?
No one really cares.
The alcohol, the drugs
Authority only shrugs.
To find a safe place to be,
A sanctuary meant for me.
Take a close look and you will see,
Ignoring us is not the key.



VOODOO DOUGHNUT

THE MAGIC IS IN THE HOLE!

22 SW 3RD & BURNSIDE
1501 NE DAVIS

OPEN 24/7!

SUPPORTING STREET ROOTS SINCE 2003



GOING ON A VACATION SOON?

BOOK YOUR STAY THROUGH **HOTELS4CHANGE**

YOU SAVE. STREET ROOTS BENEFITS.

(Especially if you or your business are a frequent traveller!)

Check out the Hotels4Change link on the Street Roots home page: www.streetroots.org