

Resolution in support of urgent rent stabilization

Whereas, rent increases have recently far exceeded increases in wages and the rate of inflation;

Whereas, the Whatcom County [homeless count increased by 27%](#) from 2022 to 2023;

Whereas, the Bellingham City Council declared a [“housing affordability and homelessness crisis”](#) on July 24, 2023;

Whereas, on August 8, 2023, the Whatcom County Council, acting as the Health Board, approved a [resolution](#) affirming that affordable housing and homelessness are a public health crisis and requesting updates on county actions;

Whereas, on January 9, 2024, Whatcom County Council [voted in favor of adding HB 2114 / SB 5961 to Whatcom County's 2024 State Legislative Priorities](#) (p. 17);

Whereas, the statewide minimum wage is insufficient to afford rising rents and costs of living in Whatcom County. According to the [National Low-Income Housing Alliance's 2022 Out Of Reach](#) report, a minimum wage worker in Whatcom County would have to work 1.4 full-time jobs to afford an average 2-bedroom fair market rental;

Whereas, [The American Community Survey](#) finds that 36.4% of Whatcom County residents are renters and 52% of those renters are cost-burdened.

Whereas, specific groups face even starker rent-burden. For renters earning 30% of the Median Family Income, nearly 71% are severely cost-burdened, paying more than half their income in rent, [according to HUD CHAS datasets](#). Farmworkers in Whatcom face an average rent burden of 42% of their income, [according to a report by the Washington Department of Commerce](#).

Whereas, the [Washington Center for Real Estate Research](#) finds that the 2023 rental vacancy rate in Whatcom County is just 2.5%, significantly below healthy rates. Low vacancy rates put tenants at increased risk of extreme rent increases and losing access to housing;

Whereas, even with bold reforms such as scrapping minimum parking mandates and adopting form-based codes, it will take time for new housing construction to really kick in;

Whereas, we need urgent action in the meantime to provide relief to renters who are facing rent increases way in excess of increases in wages;

Whereas, 40th LD State Rep. Alex Ramel introduced a bill (HB 1389) in the 2023 session to cap rental increases, and the bill advanced to the Rules Committee but was never scheduled for a floor vote;

Whereas, 40th LD State Reps. Debra Lekanoff and Alex Ramel and 40th LD State Sen. Liz Lovelett are cosponsoring a similar bill in the 2024 session.

Therefore, be it Resolved, that Whatcom Democrats urges all of our 40th and 42nd LD Democratic state legislators to support [House Bill 2114](#) or its State Senate counterpart (SB 5961), which limit annual rent increases to 5% including fees, require 6 months notice for rent

increases of 3% or more and tenants may break lease to move, and limit move-in fees to no more than 1 month rent.

We further urge that you communicate to your colleagues on key committees the critical urgency of acting on this in the 2024 session.

We further call on local government bodies, community organizations, and citizens to take part in public hearings and online testimony in support of HB 2114/SB 5961.

Adopted by a vote of 63-2 at the January 20, 2024, General Membership Meeting of the Whatcom County Democrats.