

Testimony of Anneliese Koehler, State and Regional Affairs Advisor
In Support of House Bill 278
House Committee on Rules
June 14, 2021



Metro is the elected regional government that serves nearly 1.7 million people in the 24 cities and three counties of the Portland metropolitan area. We provide a broad range of public services that includes land use and transportation planning, solid waste and recycling operations, housing and homeless services, management of parks and natural areas, and operation of major visitor facilities like the Oregon Convention Center.

While the housing crisis has long been a reality for many marginalized communities, particularly communities of color, it has increasingly become the top issue in our communities over the last decade. It is a national issue, a statewide issue and a regional issue. Metro has stepped up to address this crisis with a particular focus on those with the lowest incomes who are experiencing the most acute needs. Metro's voters passed a \$652.8 million housing bond in 2018, and just this past spring, they approved the nation's single largest investment per capita in supportive housing and homeless services. Together, these two voter-approved measures are a game changer for our region and will finally match public investment to the urgent need to address chronic homelessness.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has compounded our housing crisis and created an additional area of housing need. The sudden forced closure of businesses that employ a high percentage of low-wage workers resulted in many of our community members temporarily losing their jobs and struggling to pay their rent. The federal and state governments responded with eviction moratoria and emergency rent assistance that, combined, will help provide the bridge needed for our community to weather this temporary health and economic crisis.

However, additional strategies and policies are needed to fully leverage these efforts and stabilize community members most impacted by COVID-19. With the residential eviction moratorium expiring on June 30, more time is needed to get the unprecedented level of rent assistance out the door. HB 278 provides additional, needed tenant protections by temporarily shielding tenants from eviction for nonpayment of rent only if they have sought rent assistance. After 60 days, if the landlord has not been paid, they are able to move forward with the eviction process. This temporary protection provides the time necessary for over-burdened and under-staffed service providers to process applications and send federal dollars to Oregonians most in need.

For the 2021 session, the Metro Council's priorities call for supporting legislation that improves tenant protections and supports the immediate needs of those most impacted by COVID-19. HB 278 advances both of these goals by providing policy changes that leverage current efforts to address the housing crisis created by COVID-19 and help ensure that those most impacted by the pandemic remained stably housed today and into the future.