

**Testimony of Mary Rowe, Human Resources Director
In Opposition to House Bill 2544
Senate Committee on Workforce
April 27, 2015**



Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee:

As you know, Metro is the regional government 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, management of parks and natural areas, and operation of major visitor facilities like the Oregon Convention Center and the Oregon Zoo. This varied portfolio of activities means that we have a diverse staff represented by several bargaining units.

We draft new personnel policies and update current ones on an ongoing basis to comply with new legislation and implement and maintain best practices. We also receive new position requests that require interim bargaining. This means that we are in interim bargaining with our unions on essentially a continual basis.

The current process allows us to meet and negotiate in good faith over issues that are important to our employees and the members of our unions. However, HB 2544's requirement that we enter into binding arbitration if we do not reach agreement in interim bargaining would require a lengthy and costly process that would reduce the impetus to collaborate and increase the level of conflict in our relationship with our employees. Arbitration involves turning over decision making authority to a third party that may not be familiar with the issues at stake.

We strive to maintain a positive working relationship with our union employees and union representatives. HB 2544 seems to be aimed at curbing behavior of certain employers who may use interim bargaining as a means of gaining an unfair advantage, but it goes too far, harming employers who work collaboratively with their unions.

HB 2544 would ultimately undermine the ability of both management and unionized employees to provide excellent services to the citizens of our region. We urge you not to move it forward.