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House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness

Chair Representative Evans, Co-Vice Chairs Representative Lewis and Representative Meek

900 Court Street NE Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: SUPPORT FOR HB 2208

Chair Evans, Co-Vice Chairs Representative Lewis and Representative Meek, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Regional Disaster Preparedness Organization (RDPO), I write to express support for HB 2208. The RDPO is a bi-state partnership of local and regional government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private-sector stakeholders representing the Portland metropolitan region. Through collaborative planning, training, and exercises and investments in technology and equipment, we work together to build our region's preparedness and resilience to disasters, including earthquakes, floods, and terrorism events.

Of the 14-member jurisdictions on the RDPO Policy Committee, the following nine offer their support to HB 2208: Clackamas, Columbia, Multnomah, and Washington counties, the City of Portland, the City of Gresham, Metro, the Port of Portland, and TriMet. We recognize the threat to public safety and to post-disaster recovery that unreinforced masonry buildings (URMs) pose and the importance of establishing incentives for building owners, especially those that are less able to afford the costs. Constructed from the 1860s to around 1960, URMs are block or stone structures without steel reinforcement. Restore Oregon estimates there are between 5,000 and 10,000 URMs in our state. They include office buildings, schools, apartments, factories, churches and retail shops in rural, suburban and urban areas.

The costs of seismically retrofitting these buildings can be great. Although some building owners can afford the costs, many others cannot. Those who would struggle most include non-profits, churches and small business owners that provide important community services. Following an earthquake, government and communities will rely heavily on their services so helping them to remain in or quickly reoccupy their structures following an earthquake is critical.

In establishing a grant program designed to support these URM building owners, HB 2208 aligns with the RDPO's focus on whole-community resilience in that it recognizes the important role non-profits and others in the private sector serve in building resilience. HB 2208 also helps address equity issues which persist if only people who can afford retrofits are able to live, work or worship in seismically safe buildings.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on this important topic.

Sincerely,

Karylinn Echols

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Karylinn Echols,
RDPO Chair and City of Gresham Representative