

**Testimony of Anneliese Koehler, State and Regional Affairs Advisor
Joint Interim Committee on the Second Special Session of 2021
December 11, 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 in May 2020, 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. In the 2021 session, SB 278 passed with broad bipartisan support so that individuals and families wouldn't be evicted while they waited for state and federal rent assistance to get to their landlords. Due to overwhelming demand, statutory changes are necessary to implement this goal. The federal and state governments have promised relief to thousands of households, and we need to ensure that promise is kept.

The Metro Council's legislative principles call for supporting legislation that supports people experiencing homelessness or at risk of losing housing and provides reasonable protections for renters against arbitrary and unfair actions. We urge the Legislature to advance both these goals by providing policy changes that ensure that the federal and state efforts to address the housing crisis created by COVID-19 aren't for naught and that those most impacted by the pandemic remained stably housed today and into the future.