

Testimony of Randy Tucker, Legislative Affairs Manager
In Support of Senate Bill 554
House Committee on Rules
April 21, 2021



Chair Smith Warner and Members of the Committee:

As you know, 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, management of parks and natural areas, housing and homeless services, and operation of major visitor facilities like the Oregon Convention Center and the Oregon Zoo.

In a normal year, upwards of 3 million people, including many families, visit the Oregon Zoo, the Oregon Convention Center, Blue Lake Park and other venues we own and/or operate on behalf of the people of the region. Metro has long struggled to balance the legitimate rights of gun owners with the safety and comfort of the broader public in a dense urban environment. While most gun owners are considerate and cooperative, occasionally we have a problem with a concealed handgun license holder who insists on open carrying in a crowded public space (e.g., at the zoo) among families who have gathered for stress-free recreation. We have received many complaints about such activity but lack sufficient authority to address these incidents on our own properties.

Either by oversight or because many laws predate our existence, Metro is sometimes omitted from statutes that cover cities and counties. Such has been the case with some of the statutes that address firearm regulation. Moreover, the somewhat confusing definition of “public building” in ORS 166.360 has created uncertainty about exactly what buildings (or portions of buildings) are included, and when the grounds around the building are included. This is especially important with respect to places like the Oregon Zoo, where most visitors are not in buildings. Amending this definition per Sec. 2 of SB 554 will provide needed clarity. Along with the ability to regulate concealed weapons provided in Sec. 1 of the bill, this will enable the Metro Council to consider prudent steps to regulate the carrying of firearms on Metro properties.

One of the Metro Council’s adopted principles that guides Metro’s legislative advocacy reads:

Firearms and Public Facilities: Metro supports legislation that increases Metro’s authority to regulate the carrying of firearms on Metro properties and public venues, and opposes legislation that limits or reduces that authority.

Sections 1-4 of SB 554 support this principle. We urge you to move the bill forward.

Thank you very much for considering these comments.