

**Testimony of Pam Peck, Policy and Compliance Program Director
On Senate Bills 14, 581, and 582
Senate Committee on Energy and Environment
February 23, 2021**



Chair Beyer and Members of the Committee:

Metro is the regional government of the Portland metropolitan area, with major responsibilities for managing the region's solid waste and recycling system, addressing the full life cycle impacts of products and materials, and advancing equity to address barriers and eliminate disparities experienced by people of color. Metro serves a population of nearly 1.7 million, and provides services and educational resources that protect human and environmental health and support waste reduction.

Metro works with area city and county governments to provide recycling and waste reduction services and education and to ensure our region meets the requirements of the Oregon Opportunity to Recycle Act. Metro's role also includes oversight of garbage and recycling facilities in the region, including the material recovery facilities (MRFs) that sort materials collected for recycling from homes and businesses.

Metro supports SB 582 with the -1 amendment. This would advance the Recycling Steering Committee's consensus recommendations to modernize our state's recycling system using an approach that includes producers, local governments, and communities. Metro was pleased to be included in the statewide Recycling Steering Committee process and to work with other governments, haulers/collectors, and recyclers and businesses involved in recycling in Oregon to understand the problems our system faces and to develop comprehensive recommendations to overhaul our state's outdated recycling system. This in-depth process was carried out over a two-year period and included many opportunities for public and industry comment. The result is a well-vetted proposal that addresses the urgent problems our system faces today.

Those problems begin with customer confusion about what can be recycled, which leads to more contamination in the bin. We also find our system faced with increasing costs and struggling to equitably provide needed services, especially to multi-family households. Moreover, workers in the recycling system need a living wage.

At the other end of the process, we have very limited information about the final geographic destination and disposition of the materials Oregonians put in our recycling bins. This lack of transparency leads to growing concerns that these materials, especially plastics, are polluting oceans and overseas communities.

We can and must do better. An overhaul of our system and significant new investments are needed to ensure Oregon's recycling system supports responsible recycling and helps us reduce waste, use fewer resources and protect human health and the environment.

An updated recycling system would be both more responsible and more equitable. A more responsible system would ensure that products and packaging, especially plastics, have less

environmental impact – from how this stuff is made to whether it can be recycled responsibly. It would also mean less of Oregon’s plastic trash is polluting oceans and communities near and far. An equitable system would ensure that recycling is easy and convenient everywhere for everyone, whether you live in a house or an apartment, in a city or outside of one. Building equity into the system would also ensure that workers – like those who sort recyclable materials – have safe working conditions and living wages.

Bringing producers into the system would create an incentive for less wasteful packaging and provide resources to build a system that works for everyone. Consumer brands, packaging producers and plastics manufacturers hold the most power to make meaningful change in the products they make and the recycling system that has to manage them. It’s only fair that producers take responsibility for the problems their products and packaging cause.

Consumers and local governments have shouldered this responsibility alone for too long. With producers would come resources to build a responsible and effective recycling system and to expand services to those who haven’t had them before.

This is not a new idea in Oregon. Local examples of effective and popular producer responsibility programs include Oregon’s Bottle Bill, Oregon E-Waste and PaintCare, all of which help steward the recycling of materials into new products.

Metro also supports SB 14 which advances producer responsibility for plastic packaging and food serviceware, but we believe the holistic solutions in SB 582 that address all packaging types and printed paper offer the best approach to advance critically needed system changes. Focusing on only one portion of the materials collected in our co-mingled system would further fragment the system and bring implementation challenges.

Metro supports the concept of truth in labeling to eliminate confusing and misleading labels and claims about “recyclability.” However, we believe SB 581 by itself is not sufficient to address the problem. We need a statewide list of accepted materials and other contamination reduction elements, such as customer education, that are included in SB 582.

Recycling helps us reduce waste, use fewer resources and protect the environment for future generations. But Oregon’s recycling system was created decades ago – it wasn’t built for what we put in the bin today. It needs an overhaul.

SB 582 with the -1 amendment gives the Legislature an opportunity to take strong action now. We strongly urge your support.