

Testimony of Councilor Christine Lewis, Metro District 2

In Support of House Bill 2163

House Committee on Housing

February 23, 2021



Residents across greater Portland continue to face unprecedented challenges caused by rising housing costs without adequate affordable housing options or supports for low-income households. This ongoing housing crisis is compounded by what is increasingly called the “triple pandemic” of public health and economic crises stemming from COVID-19, and the longstanding effects of racism and white supremacy in housing policy. Now more than ever, a safe, stable and affordable home is the key to opportunity, public health and basic well-being for all.

In recent years, government, community, philanthropic and business partners have come together across greater Portland to create local housing solutions. Success in our region requires abundant, diverse, and affordable housing choices in all neighborhoods, especially neighborhoods with access to opportunity. That's why Metro has stepped up over the past few years and, together with our partners, taken meaningful steps to address the housing crisis. Metro took action in 2018 to pass the nation's first regional affordable housing bond to significantly invest in the creation of permanently affordable homes, building on a successful 2016 bond in the City of Portland. And Metro responded again in May 2020 with the nation's largest per capita investment in ending homelessness with a regional supportive housing services measure.

These policies and public investments have already begun to make an impact in our region. However, true long-term success requires further action at the state level as well. Homelessness will be solved only when all systems work together collaboratively and multiple investments are leveraged to address this critical issue. HB 2163 provides a significant opportunity to do just that by addressing a primary point of entry into homelessness. Half of all adults who are chronically homeless experienced homelessness as youth. HB 2163 offers critical housing assistance for youth aging out of foster care or experiencing homelessness, providing support necessary to help stabilize youth to be able to pursue education and training opportunities. This upstream investment will both provide a safe and stable home for youth today and work to prevent future homelessness. Additional state investments in targeted, critical programs like this help our region's local investments in housing and supportive services work better by providing much needed housing and helping to stem future need.

In addition, the investment the bill makes -- long-term rent assistance -- is one of the most powerful tools we have to provide people with the housing they need. Knowing this, Metro made a Regional Long-term Rent Assistance Program a cornerstone of our Supportive Housing Services Program. Like our own program, the rent assistance program outlined in the bill will also be more flexible than the Section 8 program and help meet service gaps due to federal restrictions.

We urge you to support HB 2163. This targeted, critical investment for youth exiting the foster care system or experiencing homelessness is a giant step forward in helping end homelessness and prevent future homelessness.