

Testimony of Anneliese Koehler, State and Regional Affairs Advisor

In Support of House Bill 3184

House Committee on Housing

March 23, 2021



Metro

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 and the Oregon Zoo.

Metro supports HB 3184 which authorizes a study of long-term rent assistance to help Oregon's lowest income residents.

Residents across greater Portland continue to face unprecedented challenges caused by rising housing costs without adequate affordable housing options or support 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. In 2018, Metro placed on the ballot, and the region's voters strongly approved, the nation's first regional affordable housing bond to make significant investments 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 when voters approved 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 partners work together collaboratively and multiple investments are leveraged to address this critical issue. HB 3184 provides an opportunity to do just that by advancing a critical tool to prevent and end homelessness: long-term rent assistance. Providing long-term rental assistance is an effective strategy to address housing instability, but existing resources are insufficient to meet the current need. Studying how Oregon could enact a statewide long-term rent assistance program is a crucial first step toward addressing homelessness and housing instability and helping our region's local investments in housing and supportive services work better by providing a pathway to much needed housing.

We urge you to support HB 3184. This study provides a critical step toward establishing a long-term rental assistance program in Oregon and addressing our housing crisis.