

Metro Council
600 N Grand Ave
Portland, OR

December 31, 2024

VIA EMAIL

Re: Supportive Housing Services Measure Reform

Dear Metro President and Councilors,

It has been over a year since Metro President Peterson approached the tri-county chairs to discuss a change in the Supportive Housing Services (SHS) measure. Since then, Metro has engaged counties, cities and other stakeholders at various tables. With the upcoming Metro Council discussion on the SHS draft ordinance, I am writing this letter to share my recommendations and considerations.

Clackamas County has a number of significant achievements since the beginning of the SHS program. In just three and half years, we have housed over 2,000 people, created 210 shelter beds and prevented 3,300 evictions. And, we have reduced homelessness by 65% since 2019!

I attribute this success to our unique policy priorities. In early 2023 the Board of County Commissioners adopted a Recovery Oriented System of Care resolution. The resolution states that “all efforts to address homelessness in which the County and its employees engage must be concentrated on helping all residents participate in realizing their full human potential, by ensuring shelter, psychiatric, behavioral health and addiction care for all who need it.” We fundamentally believe in Clackamas County that recovery is possible.

If we are to combat homelessness in our region, we must address not just the availability of affordable housing *units*, but the creation of an entire continuum of care that encompasses in-patient and out-patient substance abuse treatment (detox and medical stabilization), behavioral health services, primary care, peer support, skill building and strategies to foster belonging and community. The SHS measure has provided us with an unprecedented opportunity to close historical service gaps by investing in this full continuum.

In response to Metro Resolution No. 24-5436, which establishes priorities for an integrated and expanded regional supportive housing services and affordable housing program, I offer my own individual alternate scenario for Metro Council consideration. This letter does not represent the formal position of the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners.

1. *Expand allowable uses of supportive housing services tax revenue.*

I support expanding the allowable uses of SHS funding to include acquisition, conversion, preservation, construction and expansion of affordable housing at each County’s discretion. Additionally, these funds should be available for other capital investments in infrastructure to address the holistic needs of a person seeking housing and recovery services, like centers for addictions and treatment.

2. *Extend the expiration of supportive housing services taxes beyond 2030*

It's premature to extend the tax measure now. Once adopted regional Key Performance Metrics demonstrate success an extension should be considered in November 2026. This ensures broad community and voter engagement.

3. *Create a program by which the region's cities will receive funding for investments in supportive housing services and/or affordable housing*

I support intentional collaboration with the region's cities, they are essential partners in the success of this program. Clackamas County has funded our 14 cities with over \$7 million. These are tailor-made local solutions in partnership with our cities to deliver much needed community support. This work seamlessly connects to our larger county homeless services system. Each county will create an individual program by which the region's cities will receive programs and services. City allocations/contracts should be added to each County's Local Implementation Plans (LIP) and regularly reported on.

4. *The establishment of a new regional housing and homelessness oversight structure that improves coordination and collaboration*

I support a streamlined regional housing and homelessness oversight structure made up of seven elected representatives, one from each jurisdiction (counties, Metro, 1 city from each county). Subcommittees may exist to offer technical expertise and guidance but should be non-voting. The purpose should be to develop a Regional Housing Strategy and Regional Key Performance Metrics that must be agreed upon mutually between the counties and Metro. A single committee made up of elected officials (not special interest groups) with direct accountability to the region's voters is the best way to ensure transparency to the public.

5. *Enact a SHS personal income tax rate decrease*

I support a modest rate decrease of 5% (.95) for the personal income tax which Metro can enact within its own authority. However, any revenue changes should allow counties ample time to reduce programming and services in a way that does not disrupt this vulnerable population.

6. *A conservative funding allocation approach to budgeting revenues*

I support the current model of funding allocations in which all collected revenue (except collection and Metro administrative fees) are distributed to the counties. Clackamas County receives 21.33% of what is generated. There is no need to set an arbitrary floor or ceiling on this volatile funding source. Maximum flexibility should be given to the counties. Here are some additional considerations:

- Counties should continue to budget conservatively from the annual Metro forecast, ensuring sufficient reserves;
- the Regional Investment Fund (RIF) will be set aside from Metro's administration fee; and
- Metro's administration fee should be reduced from 5% to 2.5%.

Much of what I have proposed in this letter can be achieved within the existing intergovernmental agreement (IGA) between Metro and the County, which does allow for some course correcting. I am concerned that any radical changes will significantly impact the most vulnerable individuals and families in our community. This destabilization may not only result in the loss of housing and services but also the loss of the public's trust in all of us as local elected leaders.

I urge you to be a NO vote on a new ordinance for the SHS "reform" program and instead engage in meaningful discussions with your county partners. A vote to extend the measure should be postponed.

The voters trusted us to address the regional homelessness crisis. The counties and our service partners are achieving the goals. We must continue to respond with real outcomes, transparency and better communication.

Thank you,

Ben West, Commissioner
Clackamas County Board of Commissioners

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