

Lynn Peterson, President  
Metro Council  
600 N Grand Ave  
Portland, OR

June 27, 2024

Dear President Peterson and Metro Councilors,

Clackamas County has observed Metro's interest and intent to refer a ballot measure amending the current Supportive Housing Services (SHS) program. Chair Smith has participated in Metro's recent stakeholder roundtables and our staff have kept us apprised of the continuing conversations Metro has had with the three counties. However, with the anticipated July 9 recommendation on measure referral from the Metro Chief Operating Officer to the Metro Council, this Board would like to bring forward a number of questions and concerns.

Our priorities continue to remain firmly rooted in the promises made to voters in measure 26-210. Clackamas County's goal is to make homelessness rare, brief and non-reoccurring. This Board is committed to not just housing individuals but to putting them on a road to self-sufficiency, healing and wholeness. We are achieving this goal. Consequently, we are left wondering what is Metro's goal in seeking a change through a ballot measure and does it risk the success we are experiencing in Clackamas County?

Since the approval of this regional funding measure, and in partnership with our cities, other jurisdictional partners and community-based organizations, Clackamas County has built a homeless services system we have long needed. We are proud of the community collaboration that has made this possible and resulted in our early success. We have seen amazing results in just three years: "Clackamas County reduced homelessness by 65% since homeless services tax passed" (oregonlive.com, Feb 27, 2024). Clackamas County needs continued flexibility to achieve these local and regional goals.

Clackamas County's success can be attributed to the implementation of a Recovery Oriented System of Care (ROSC). This focus has allowed us to program services around the needs of the whole person by increasing access to treatment while providing accountability. The ROSC allows all stakeholders in the community to participate in the recovery continuum. In Clackamas County, we are building out essential infrastructure to fill in the gaps of this system. We look forward to expanding and partnering with other jurisdictions to share our learnings and extend its reaches.

As Metro considers a change in the tax rate, please remember that the cost to deliver services and complexities people are facing have greatly increased in the last three years. We are fortunate that revenue has come in higher than anticipated – the original estimate of \$250 million would not have allowed us to achieve the promised outcomes. Does Metro understand the impacts or tradeoffs the counties will have to make to accommodate reductions in revenue and trying to do more with less? Will we have to unwind programs and services that are serving our community well and ending chronic homelessness for hundreds of people in Clackamas County?

Additionally, this income tax collection mechanism is unpredictable and unstable. Has Metro collected enough financial data to create a financial forecast we can trust and rely on to build stable programs over time? Already this year revenues are coming in under projections.

This historic investment in ending homelessness for thousands of people is just three years into the ten-year measure. It is making a difference in Clackamas County and in the region, but there is still substantial work to do. The Clackamas County Board of Commissioners believes we have not yet earned the right to ask the public for an extension or the elimination of the sunset. We need to continue building on our successes, evaluating these programs to ensure optimal outcomes and engaging the community in more meaningful solutions-oriented dialogue. The time is not right to change the program now and lose focus on our core goals.

We have unique standing as a county. Not only are we tasked with delivering the services funded by the SHS measure, we are a party to the Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) with Metro. The changes Metro is considering will require a renegotiation of our current IGA. During renegotiation, we will require terms and conditions necessary to ensure Clackamas County has the flexibility to continue successfully meeting the SHS mandate established by voters, and that all parties are accountable for their obligations under the respective IGAs. While we have not taken a formal position on your efforts to date, because there are still many unknowns, we are deeply concerned about the tight timeline to refer a potential ballot measure for November 2024.

We ask you to pause on any ballot referral to the voters in 2024 until the region can demonstrate to the public the true successes of the current SHS programs.

The public gave the region a gift in 2020, a financial tool to invest and build a homeless services system. However, SHS is an incomplete solution to solving all of the gaps in the full continuum of care. Regional homeless service providers are doing great work, but they are being asked to resolve all of the needs in other systems like mental health care, addiction treatment, and even housing affordability. We must use the momentum created by SHS to compel these other systems and partners in the region to come together now, to collaborate and to continue the conversation about finding the broader and sustainable solutions we need for a true recovery-oriented system.

Thank you for your consideration of these questions and concerns. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Tootie Smith, Chair  
on behalf of the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners