

**Testimony of Anneliese Koehler, State and Regional Affairs Advisor
In Support of House Bill 4040
House Committee on Economic Recovery and Prosperity
February 9, 2022**



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. Among our various other responsibilities, we own and/or operate visitor venues of statewide and regional significance: the Oregon Convention Center, Oregon Zoo, Portland Expo Center and Portland's Centers for the Arts.

Metro supports House Bill 4040 which invests a critical lifeline for Oregon's cultural and event organizations negatively impacted by COVID-19.

In March of 2020, the onset of the pandemic resulted in the sudden closure of all of our visitor venues. This closure eliminated the venues' entire revenue streams, required Metro leadership to lay off 700 staff members representing about three-quarters of the venues' total workforce, and curtailed the economic and cultural benefits these facilities provide to the community. In the following months, the economic situation for our venues worsened, and Metro was forced to seriously consider the dire consequences of being unable to obtain any resources for these venues. Fortunately, thanks to generous support from the state and federal government, we were able to avoid the worst, and following appropriate state guidelines and timelines, began re-opening our facilities.

As we rehired staff and welcomed community members back through 2021, things looked brighter. However, we are still far from normal operations. At Portland's Center for the Arts, some audience members are reticent to return and attendance overall is down 35 percent. At the Oregon Convention Center, commiserate to need, we are operating with staffing at about half of pre-pandemic levels. The Omicron variant has introduced yet another wave of uncertainty and cancellations at all of our venues. For example, an estimated 8,000-attendee January consumer show canceled, as well as a February Key Club student event. Portland's Center for the Arts has also experienced cancellations as performers come down with breakthrough COVID cases or simply decide to postpone touring altogether.

We know that our experience and situation is mirrored in cultural and event institutions across our region and our state. Additional assistance is needed to ensure that our state does not lose the cultural and event cornerstones in our communities. Metro urges the Legislature to pass House Bill 4040 and provide critical support for our cultural and event organizations.