

March 13, 2023

Representative Paul Holvey
Chair, House Committee On Business and Labor
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Support for HB 3205

Chair Holvey and Members of the Committee:

TriMet is Oregon's largest transit provider, serving more than 1.6 million people across our 533-square mile service territory. Our fleet includes about 700 buses and over 140 MAX light rail cars, which means we need over 1,600 bus and light rail operators to provide reliable transit to all the communities we serve. We write today in support of HB 3205, which would restore our ability to offer hire and retention bonuses to the employees that our transit system depends on.

Being a transit operator is a challenging job, and it's a job that has gotten harder as a result of the increase in criminal activity and drug use in the community and on our buses and trains that we've seen in the past several years. We are working on several other bills this session to address operator safety, but these issues have contributed to resignations and retirements outpacing hiring at TriMet since 2020.

In response, TriMet raised our starting wage for operators to over \$27/hour in December 2021, and we began offering to train new drivers to receive their commercial driver's licenses. Despite these incentives, it wasn't until we started offering a \$7,500 hiring bonus in April of 2022 that we saw hiring begin to exceed attrition at TriMet for the first time since the start of the pandemic. In the ten months preceding April 2022, we received 900 applications. In the ten months following the \$7,500 bonus, we received 3,427 applications.

When the bonus exemption to Oregon's pay equity law expired in September of 2022, we made the decision to give this \$7,500 bonus to all of our bus operators to thank them for the essential, challenging work they do for our agency. TriMet has had incredible success recruiting operators in this challenging market by offering these bonuses, and we do not want to lose the ability to provide these valuable incentives to our employees. The Portland Metro area is a bi-state region, and C-TRAN, our partner transit agency in Vancouver, is able to offer hiring and retention bonuses that can lure skilled workers away from TriMet.

Treating our employees equitably is a core value at TriMet, and while we appreciate the ways in which Oregon's Equal Pay Act helps to prevent discrimination in the workplace, we don't believe that the law intended to include non-discretionary bonuses for the purpose of recruiting and retaining employees. However, without the clarity provided by HB 3205, we are concerned that we will lose these invaluable tools.

The historic operator shortage facing TriMet and other transit agencies is not abating, and when we do not have enough drivers to provide reliable service, the Oregonians who depend on us for their transportation needs are the ones who suffer. Please pass HB 3205 to support our hiring and retention efforts.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kim Sewell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kim Sewell
Executive Director of Labor Relations & Human Resources
TriMet