



May 28, 2021

To: Multnomah Co. Chair Kafoury and Commissioners Meieran, Jayapal, Vega Pederson, Stegmann

From: Portland Lodging Alliance

Re: URGENT PRIORITY – Maximize Homeless Services Budget Now

Dear Chair Kafoury and Commissioners,

The Portland Lodging Alliance (PLA) urges you, in the strongest possible terms, to maximize your focus and funding on the County's severe and obvious homelessness crisis. As a region, we have spiraled out of crisis and into humanitarian disaster. Recession, job loss, eviction, affordability, availability, pandemic - the reasons for this disaster are all well documented. Now is not the time to re-litigate the 'why' but, instead, use this time in history and the additional resources it has afforded the County to attack the short-term shelter deficit and wrap around social services that the currently unhoused so desperately need.

Now. Immediately. Even as you work with the City of Portland, federal agencies, businesses, community advocates and so many other vested stakeholders working together toward longer term housing, shelter, mental health and social services solutions.

The PLA, representing a cross-section of Portland hotel owners and operators, are Ambassadors of the County. We begin and end every day with the safety of staff and customers top of mind. The impact of 'temporary shelters' and the homeless crisis puts citizens, staff, guests and visitors at greater risk of harassment and harm. This, in turn, has a very direct and negative impact on occupancy rates, conference business and traveler experiences. It should not be lost on any of us that a return to historical levels of tourism is part of the formula we all need to generate tax revenue to support regional programs including shelter, affordable housing and homelessness services. Travelers come to Portland for its parks, gardens, food, arts and culture and historical attractions. Now, we hear first-hand from those same travelers that they have no intention of returning. Not until tents, camping, filth, garbage, graffiti and crime - the most obvious results of current policy – are mitigated.

Now is the time to reclaim Portland and re-establish the entire metropolitan region as the top-tier destination it once was such a short time ago. There is simply no more time to waste before the harm already done is irreparable. Specifically, the PLA requests that Multnomah County:

Commit the County's share of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, reportedly \$157.6 million of which \$78.8 million is initially available, to focus on adding short-term shelter capacity and related social services as a bridge to longer term solutions. We are aware of the legal threshold established in *Martin vs Boise*, finding that local governments must provide a warm and dry place for unhoused residents to sleep at any given time as a prerequisite to enforcing clear sidewalks, parks, and other public spaces. Current short-term capacity is inadequate to adhere to *Martin vs Boise*. Thus, sidewalks and doorways remain impassable with tents and trash.

Leverage the region's thriving technology community to create a real-time dashboard that can track public and private shelter availability 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Portland Street Response and all housing advocates must have accurate, real-time data to efficiently direct and transport the unhoused to available short-term shelter.

Work in collaboration and transparency with Metro, the City of Portland and the web of other public sector agencies and jurisdictions, including implementing Portland's new Shelter to Housing Continuum (S2HC), to efficiently align shelter sitings, social services and available budgets, including new sources of immediate ARPA funding.

Work in collaboration and good faith with private sector partners such as the HereTogether Coalition, Portland Lodging Alliance, Portland Business Alliance, Rose City Downtown Collective, Old Town Community Association and the myriad of vested business partners – all of whom are your Ambassadors to the region.

Members of the PLA and the workforce they care deeply about have withstood a battering from COVID-19, business and travel restrictions, ongoing destructive protests, increased operating costs and labor shortages. Through it all, PLA members have continued their leadership and investments in Portland, actively partnering with SOLVE, Travel Portland, the Portland Business Alliance and other organizations committed to the City of Portland and its economy. Recently, the PLA supported the increased assessment of the Tourism Improvement District, a direct assessment on the hotel and lodging industry dedicated to increasing tourism, enhancing the tourist experience, and providing vital tax revenue to the region.

The Portland Lodging Alliance and, by extension, the Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association, recognizes the severity of the housing, homelessness and affordability crisis currently engulfing Portland. We remain committed corporate and private citizens in our dialogue and action.

The County must urgently prioritize its homeless services budget.