



February 12th, 2024

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and members of the committee,

My name is Jon Isaacs, and I am the Executive Vice President of Public Affairs for the Portland Metro Chamber. Thank you for allowing me to join you virtually today. The Portland Metro Chamber (The Chamber) is greater Portland's Chamber of Commerce and with over 2,300 members, represents the largest, most diverse network of businesses in the region. Over 80% of our members are small businesses.

The Portland Metro Chamber is also the formal contractual partner of Downtown Portland Clean & Safe, the largest business improvement district in Portland, covering most of the westside of Downtown Portland. Downtown Clean & Safe provides enhanced cleaning, security, and downtown retail promotion. We also track and report the city's official statistics measuring the economic health of downtown including foot traffic and commercial and retail leasing activity.

I am here today to express the Chamber's strong support for Senate Bill 1553 with the -1 amendments.

First, I want to repeat what I said in my testimony in support of HB 4002, which will bring back meaningful criminal penalties for the illegal possession of fentanyl, meth, and heroin. We have worked tirelessly the past two years with our partners at the City of Portland, TriMet, Portland Police and Fire Bureaus, Travel Portland, the Multnomah County District Attorney's office, neighborhood associations, and more to revitalize and recover downtown Portland. We have made measurable progress, but no matter the effort and the financial investment - which is well into the tens of millions of public and private dollars - we cannot overcome the unrelenting scourge of fentanyl. We need your help this session if we are going to be able to accelerate our progress. I want to be crystal clear - the public sale and use of fentanyl and other hard drugs is the single biggest problem facing the City of Portland today.

Pre-pandemic, when Portland was the fifth fastest growing regional economy in the nation, we were in collaboration with the City of Portland and TriMet, making plans to accelerate the growth of Transit for central city commuters. But even then TriMet identified the growing use of hard drugs and the perceived lack of safety as one of the primary reasons that ridership had begun to plateau. As you know, Trimet has seen ridership decrease even further since the pandemic due primarily to the perceived lack of safety, with a 30% drop in active riders reporting that they feel unsafe using TriMet.

I also represent the Portland Metro Chamber on the TriMet HB 2017 Transit Advisory Committee. Among several responsibilities, each year the committee approves recommendations for the use of a bucket of discretionary funds dedicated to increasing access to transit. One of the primary inputs we consider for these recommendations is a community survey of riders and non-riders which receives a robust response in the thousands. The 2023 survey found that 84% of respondents consider security to be very important and was 2nd only to expanding service at 86%. But among non-English speaking respondents it was the number one concern with 88% saying it was very important.

Establishing meaningful criminal penalties for using hard hard drugs on transit, in our view, is simple common sense especially with such a clear call to action from the community. And it represents a concrete action you can take to support the local work we are doing every day, week, and month to restore livability and vibrancy to the City of Portland. For these reasons, we urge you to support SB 1553 -1 amendments. Thank you.

Jon Isaacs (*he/him*)

Executive Vice President, Public Affairs

PORTLAND METRO CHAMBER, Greater Portland's Chamber of Commerce

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