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September 30, 2020

Economic Development Administration – Seattle Regional Office
Jackson Federal Building
915 Second Avenue, Room 1890
Seattle, WA 98174-1012

Dear Economic Development Administration Grant Review Committee,

We are writing to urge your support of Metro Regional Government's (Metro's) CARES Act grant proposal for projects to boost the three-county region's vital tourism sector. Through its Metropolitan Exposition Recreation Commission (MERC), Metro works to protect the public investment in key regional visitor venues, including the Oregon Convention Center, the most significant driver of the tourism economy in Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on Oregon's tourism industry, with the greatest losses suffered in the Portland metropolitan region. Prior to the onset of the pandemic, tourism spending in the region reached over \$5.8 billion, accounting for 39,170 jobs and generating over \$288 million in state and local taxes in 2019. Hotel properties in Multnomah, Washington and Clackamas Counties were responsible for just over 40% of Oregon's total statewide transient lodging tax collections of \$355 million. However, by the end of March 2020, Portland's hotel occupancy dropped to just 14%, an 84.3% decline from the previous year. The region's hotel occupancy dropped to 20.1%, a 73.2% decline from the year before. In the same week, passenger throughput at Portland International Airport, Oregon's largest, was down 93.9%. Our region is in dire need of assistance as we begin the long process of recovery and work to restore the thousands of jobs lost due to this crisis.

Meetings and conventions are significant economic multipliers for the three-county area served by Metro with direct economic impact on the region as measured by jobs, tax revenue and spending by convention clients and delegates from out-of-state. Meetings, conferences and events held in 2019 at the Oregon Convention Center, the largest in the Pacific Northwest, accounted for \$655 million in direct, indirect and induced spending, generating \$23.2 million in state and local taxes and supporting 5,980 jobs. Convention attendees spend an average of \$404 per night during their visits. Thousands of businesses, including hotels, restaurants, live event support services, transportation providers, and a multitude of wineries, breweries and local makers receive vast economic benefits when convention attendees shop, sip and dine throughout Oregon.

Metro's grant application proposes collaborative projects that will support the three-county region's tourism industry in retaining employees, recovering lost jobs and recapturing the economic impacts that bestow a multitude of benefits in our communities. In particular, the proposed shift in

marketing and sales strategies presents new opportunities for alignment with Greater Portland, Inc., the region's Economic Development District. Additionally, the GBAC STAR™ accreditation that Metro and Travel Portland will seek for key venues and partner businesses will help give the destination a competitive advantage in retaining at-risk convention business, winning new business and attracting leisure travelers. Such collaboration and coordination is critical to a robust and sustainable recovery for the region and we look forward to remaining engaged with industry and economic development partners in this work to help ensure their success.

We strongly support the projects contained in this grant proposal and urge you to fund Metro as they lead the way in ensuring the businesses that comprise the region's tourism industry may reopen and succeed into the future. Supporting Metro and Travel Portland is critical to growing jobs and increasing economic activity for our communities.

Sincerely,

Jim Bernard
Chair
Clackamas County Commission



Kathryn Harrington
Chair, Board of Commissioners
Washington County



Deborah Kafoury
Chair, Board of County Commissioners
Multnomah County

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Deborah Kafoury".

