Members of the Oregon Senate
VIA Email
Re: SB 26

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to you in support of SB 26. I write on behalf of Klamath County's residents.

Rural communities, hit hard by declining timber revenue and payments from Federal Government, are having a tough time providing vital public safety services. When surveyed, an overwhelming number of people say public safety ought to be the top funding priority of county government. With that in mind, I hope you consider supporting SB 26, an effort to remove the sunset clause on legislation allowing counties to continue to use some of their road reserves for providing law enforcement services.

After thoughtful deliberations over the last three years, the Klamath County budget committee opted to use a very small percentage of our overall road reserves in order to provide the minimum level of patrol services we have felt are vital for maintaining the peace and protecting the public. Absent that funding, we would have been forced to lay off about half of our Sheriff's staff and would have no longer been able to provide patrol services for more than 12 hours a day. That lay off would have also forced the closure of two thirds of the Jail, making it a "catch and release" facility. We don't need to speculate as to the impact this has on the entire public safety system, we've seen it first-hand. In 2010, prior to being able to use a small amount of road funds, the then Sheriff and Board of Commissioners issued massive lay-offs and reduced the jail to one pod. As many had warned, this created a total breakdown of our entire criminal justice system and created an unsafe environment for our taxpayers.

As good fiscal stewards, we know the importance of maintaining the integrity of the road reserve fund, but the reality is we cannot put the public at risk while keeping that fund at nearly one hundred million dollars.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me with any questions or comments.

Respectfully,

Kelley Minty Morris
Klamath County Commissioner
541-883-5100