

Dear Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

I'm writing to express my concerns about Senate Bill 431 which would create a new governmental entity to manage and repair the system of levees along the Columbia River from Portland to Troutdale. Unfortunately SB 431, as introduced, contains huge flaws that need to be remedied before the legislation should be allowed to move forward. The new governmental entity that would be created by SB 431 will have sweeping new powers that will have significant impacts on our communities and our environment and it is important that this legislation be carefully crafted in a way that is inclusive and meets the needs of our communities.

The Columbia River Levee System was built at a time when little or no consideration was given to the environmental impacts of flood control or to working with the natural hydrology of the landscape. Nobody questions the need to keep our communities safe from flooding, but a 21st Century approach to flood management needs to integrate ecological health, environmental justice and climate change. SB 431 creates a new layer of government with broad new powers, including assessing taxes and condemning land, but which is lacking in accountability and transparency and which includes an exceedingly weak commitment to ecological health, environmental justice and climate change adaptation.

While the Levee Ready Columbia process has been ongoing for several years, the proposed legislation to create a new governmental entity has had minimal public outreach and review beyond the entities (mostly governmental entities) directly engaged in the Levee Ready Process. Outreach that has been done has focused primarily within the boundaries of the existing levee system, but the governmental entity that will be created by this legislation anticipates spreading the costs of the levee system across all the residents of Mult. Co.

Major problems with SB 431 include:

- Lack of adequate public outreach to stakeholders and the community at large regarding the contents of this legislation
- Lack of clear environmental mission for the new flood district
- Lack of clear environmental justice/equity mission for the new flood district
- Board structures dominated by existing governmental agencies
- Excessive powers that go beyond what is needed to accomplish the district's mission including powers of condemnation of public and private lands which supersedes the authority of existing public entities

We urge the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee to not advance this legislation until these deficiencies can be fully addressed in an inclusive and transparent manner. It is imperative that before the Oregon Legislature creates an entirely new governmental agency to address flood management along the Columbia River, that Levee Ready Columbia work with stakeholders to craft legislation that advances flood safety in a way that is inclusive, accountable, equitable and environmentally responsible. As introduced, SB 431 fails on all accounts.

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