

Paul L Evans
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 20



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 28, 2019

Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness
Oregon House of Representatives
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Colleagues:

House Bills 2730 and 2734 are complimentary measures. House Bill 2730 would effectively transition the functions of the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) within the Oregon Military Department (OMD) into the Oregon Department of Emergency Management. House Bill 2734 provides for a significant increase in staffing for an expanded role within our state and communities.

These measures are offered as a package to resolve systemic challenges inherent to our existing structure of emergency management delivery. When the office was established within the OMD (from the Oregon State Police) it was done so because of an emergent national security posture. It was done because of a belief that the OMD had the logistical capacities to accomplish the federal as well as state missions; it was done because of a belief in the experience of the senior leadership at the OMD.

Twelve years later our realities are much different. The OMD is now smaller than it was, and the men and women who serve in the Oregon Air and Army National Guard are experiencing a contingency operations deployment tempo previously unknown. On top of that, recent audits of the organization have repeatedly demonstrated the need for adjusting structural as well as systemic norms. Even though all involved have worked hard to make the existing arrangement function, at times it appears as if the relationship between OEM and OMD is an obstacle, rather than a benefit for the vast interdisciplinary, multi-agency partnerships required for optimizing our state as well as local emergency management services delivery.

House Bill 2734 would provide the new department with regional capacities, enhanced grant support staffing, and an internal exercise coordination role that is desperately needed. The measure seeks to establish an appropriately resourced framework for supporting local incident commanders – for providing the Governor with an instrument designed around the way the US Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency functions. This is an essential, but lacking capacity that must be addressed with all deliberate speed. It must be noted that previous efforts to address this gap have failed because of uncertainty about the efficacy of existing structures to deliver necessary outcomes.

Several nearby states have a similar structure to ours; nearly all of them are currently reevaluating the structures and systems of emergency management services delivery. There is no “perfect” organizational model, but there may be a better, more effective way to serve the People of Oregon. And given our recent experiences with large-scale wildfires and the likelihood of a catastrophic seismic event in the future, it is time for action. This legislation is offered to provide a vehicle for either transitioning the office into a stand-alone department or determine how – and why – the existing structure is a preferred alternative. Either way, the people win.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paul L. Evans".

Paul L. Evans
Oregon House of Representatives (HD 20)