

Senate committee to vote on bill honoring firefighters

Family of a fallen Columbia County firefighter, other supporters testify at state capital

By **NICOLE THILL-PACHECO**
The Spotlight

A Senate bill proposing to allow the names of fallen firefighters to be included on roadside memorials went before the Senate Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness on Wednesday, Feb. 27.

Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, introduced SB 528 on behalf of the family of Robert Hales, a fallen firefighter who served as volunteer with Scappoose Fire District for eight years before he died in 2008.

Evelyn Hudson, Hales' aunt, has actively promoted the legislation and is encouraging others to get involved in the process. She and her family drove to Salem Tuesday night in poor weather so they could be at the state capital at 8 a.m. Wednesday for the committee meeting.

"It went very well in spite of the snow everywhere," Hudson said.

A group of 18 people attended the Senate hearing to speak in favor of the bill. Hudson said there was no opposition testimony.

"It was great. The committee was

very touched with our testimonies," Hudson said.

Supporters who attended the hearing included Hales' wife and other family members, supportive firefighters, several family friends and various representatives from state agencies, including the Oregon Volunteer Firefighters Association and the Oregon Fire Chiefs Association. Scappoose Fire Chief Mike Greisen was also present at the public hearing.

Mary Hales, Robert's wife, captured her sentiment in a written statement presented to the committee:

"My hope is that this bill will pass so that Fallen firefighters will be able to have memorial signs as well so that in future years people will see the signs and will read my husband's name, Robert Arnold Hales, or my friend's son's name Scott Charlson or any of the names of Oregon's Fallen Firefighters and be reminded that first responders and public officers are putting their safety and their lives on the line daily so that we can live comfortably and safely here in Oregon and across the nation."

"We were grateful. Very very grateful," Hudson said Wednesday after the hearing. "We appreciate everybody's support."

The committee is expected to vote March 6 to determine if to determine if the bill will pass to the House of Representatives, where it will undergo a similar public hearing process.



Robert Hales, who served Scappoose Fire District as a volunteer firefighter for eight years, died in 2008 after serving a 12-hour shift. His family is now supporting legislation to allow for the names of fallen firefighters to be included on roadside memorials.

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