



February 19, 2020

Through a membership of 15 denominations and over 150 congregations, organizations, and interfaith partners, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) serves hundreds of thousands of diverse members of the faith community all across the state.

We begin by offering a simple prayer: Almighty God, help us heal our divisions and recognize the abundance of your Creation.

As a faith-based organization, EMO has two fundamental commitments:

1. To serve and center the needs of the most vulnerable Oregonians
2. To serve the entire state.

EMO's Creation Justice committee advocates specifically for our members' shared core and common beliefs in our obligations as God's stewards to use the resources of nature wisely and with reverence and to preserve God's bounty for all generations to come. We have also discerned and prioritized the values of justice, reconciliation, and love for all our neighbors, the Earth and all of its creatures.

We are holding these core commitments and values in tension in urging the legislature to pass HB 4167 this session.

Serving and Centering the Needs of the Most Vulnerable

Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Matt. 22:37-40. Jesus also teaches us to care especially for the poor and disenfranchised, for we will be judged on the circle of protection we establish for those most in need: "Whenever you failed to help any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you failed to do it for me." Matt. 25:31-46.

Thus, our faith compels us to center the needs of those most at risk in the climate crisis: our children and youth, the poor, people of color, and the Earth itself—God's creation, the intricate, diverse, and sacred web of life that nourishes our bodies and spirits and connects us to each other and to the divine.

EMO recently convened a meeting of approximately 40 faith leaders from around the state for a gathering at the Claremont School of

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Interchurch Center
0245 SW Bancroft St., Ste. B
Portland, Oregon 97239

phone (503) 221-1054

fax (503) 223-7007

email emo@emoregon.org

website emoregon.org

Theology at Willamette University entitled, *A Community Response to Climate Change*. At our gathering we listened to representatives of several community groups whose people are already suffering from climate change impacts, including the NAACP, Verde, and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

Many of our members also attended youth climate strikes across the state last fall. We heard numerous prophetic speakers and truth-tellers share stories of fear and loss, and of strength and hope. We were especially moved by the prophetic witness of Pacific Islander students whose homes are at risk due to rising sea levels. These young people will not let their culture, identity, and place be erased. How could anyone with eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to feel not be moved by such testimony?

EMO therefore stands with Oregon's children and youth, the poor and disenfranchised, and our vulnerable communities of color. We hear their cry. We acknowledge their fear and loss. We celebrate their strength. We respect their leadership. We share their hope and determination.

However, our core beliefs and values are in tension with our support for HB 4167 because the bill cannot produce the emissions reductions needed in Oregon to avert the climate crisis. Moreover, the bill doesn't respond fully to the demands for climate and environmental justice we've heard from our most vulnerable citizens. We lament our lack of will and ability to do more at this crucial time.

Serving the Entire State

HB 4167 is the end product of political compromise. It reflects years of listening and responding to concerns from all Oregonians, rich and poor, rural and urban, Black, white, Asian, Latinx and tribal members. As people of faith and especially as leaders of worshipping communities, we understand that compromise is difficult and time consuming. Our people are rarely of one mind. Yet, the search for common ground is essential. Finding it is precious. As representatives of diverse faith communities from across Oregon and committed to serving all Oregonians in need, it is essential for us to remain in relationship even when we disagree.

We support HB 4167 despite our concerns about its inadequacies because we must act now and we must stay in relationship, especially through our disagreements and disappointments. EMO therefore stands for Oregon.

To reflect on some of the concerns raised by opponents of HB 4167, we see and feel the fear and loss of Oregonians whose local communities and economies have been disrupted by global forces that prioritize profits, competition, and efficiency over the well-being of people and nature. As an organization that centers the marginalized and directly serves food insecure and housing insecure Oregonians, we sense that myriad and legitimate fears and anxieties unrelated to climate are being projected onto HB 4167 because it's an easy and readily available target.

While these forces may be beyond our control, how we respond to them is fully within our grasp. We must act collectively, meaningfully, and compassionately seek to lessen the burdens of all Oregonians who are suffering the most from economic disruption.

We truly believe the bill reasonably balances the concerns of Oregon's rural residents and the interests of Oregon's business and utility owners with the necessity of taking action to address the climate crisis. However, it's not reasonable to expect HB 4167 to address more complex issues of rural economic development. The Oregon legislature and Governor Brown must prioritize these issues going forward.

Remaining in Relationship

EMO is committed to remaining in relationship and pledges to work with all Oregonians of good will regardless of political affiliation or religious belief to improve the future for all our people and all God's creatures.

We understand that HB 4167 is fixed at this time and no further amendments will be considered. However, we are attaching specific comments submitted in connection with LC 19 for the legislative record. We appreciate the committee's response to these comments. We continue to hope for bipartisan support for measures to address "pollution hotspots," which remains an environmental justice issue of concern to us.

In future sessions, EMO will continue to advocate for:

- Enforceable, measurable emissions reductions that are consistent with the demands of our children and youth and the recommendations of the world's best climate scientists;
- Policies to address emissions from transportation fuels that will lessen the urban/rural divide rather than enhance it;
- The principle of polluter pays;
- All people suffering from environmental injustice, especially those in impacted communities who are disproportionately harmed by excessive exposures to toxic pollutants;
- All people suffering from economic injustice, especially those in rural areas and small cities that have not recovered from the great recession or that are in decline due to the changing global economy; and,
- The protection of God's creation and creatures and the wise, sustainable, just, and reverent use of God's gifts to us.

Finally, many of our congregations are purchasing green power, improving energy efficiency, and installing solar photovoltaic systems to generate clean electricity to voluntarily reduce and mitigate their greenhouse gas emissions consistent with the Paris Climate Agreement's goal of limiting warming to 1.5°C. These voluntary measures are inspiring, sacrificial, visionary, and the

right thing to do as God's stewards. EMO will continue to support and inspire these leaders by working with our national partners at Interfaith Power and Light.

We are grateful for all the efforts at bipartisanship to craft HB 4167. We thank all participants and their allies and supporters for engaging in this process. We look forward to our continuing work with you in the years ahead.

Sincerely yours,

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, Creation Justice Programs

Thank you for your partnership!

Sincerely,

Britt Conroy
Public Policy Director
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

