



Oregon

Governor Kate Brown

Housing and Community Services

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Senator Kayse Jama, Chair
Senator Dennis Linthicum, Vice-Chair

Senate Committee on Housing and Development
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301-4048

Re: Additional information on a wildfire consultant

Dear Chair Fahey, Vice-Chair Linthicum, and Members of the Senate Committee on Housing and Development:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our work at Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) and how we provide safe, stable, affordable housing for Oregonians. We are grateful for your partnership as we address these issues of vital concern to our communities, which includes equitable wildfire recovery efforts. During the committee hearing, Senators Linthicum and Patterson raised a question about the use of a national consultant to aid in wildfire response.

Oregon has never seen a wildfire disaster of this scale. For the first time, OHCS is engaging with FEMA and other federal partners as OHCS and the Oregon Housing Disaster Task Force support the state through equitable housing recovery. This includes navigating complex appeals processes, duplication of benefits, sequence of delivery, and other federal requirements which could result in hundreds of millions of dollars in federal resources, including Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR). To maximize federal resources, OHCS is hiring a disaster consultant with robust experience in supporting communities through recovery.

Agency leadership have communicated with partners in other states that have experienced similar disaster devastation and have utilized consultants as a fundamental part of the long-term recovery, rebuilding and resilience. Investing in a consultant now increases Oregon's likelihood of return of investment through increased federal recovery resources. It also increases the chance that recovery resources come close to matching the scale of wreckage brought on by wildfires. That's why OHCS asked the Joint Emergency Board for resources for this consultant last Fall. OHCS staff consulted with additional partners and designed a Request for Proposals (RFP), which is currently being reviewed by the Department of Justice. OHCS anticipates posting the RFP late this week or next week. The solicitation period will be fairly short with the ultimate goal of bringing on a consultant in March.

In March OHCS and partners will be refining key action steps for the Disaster Housing Recovery Action Plan (DHRAP). The consultant's skill, knowledge, and experience will provide guidance as we finalize the DHRAP in May. The consultant will also provide guidance to jurisdictions as they begin implementation of the DHRAP.

If not for this consultant, OHCS staff would be left navigating the path toward equitable recovery without honed expertise. This would increase staffing needs (potentially many new staff this biennium) for the agency while also disadvantaging the state, as Oregon may have to compete for a pot of resources with other states that have more disaster experience. Additionally, as we potentially see new funds come to the state, this consultant will help OHCS prepare to administer specialized federal disaster recovery grants, such as Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery . Their expertise will be available to OHCS in 2020 and beyond to provide guidance on methods to ensure federal grants can be effectively deployed to meet local and tribal recovery, rebuilding and mitigation needs.

Through no fault of their own, our friends and neighbors are facing some of the most challenging times in recent memory. OHCS staff are doing all we can to ensure Oregon can recovery from these devastating fires. Please let us know if we can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

Margaret Salazar
Oregon Housing and Community Services, Executive Director