



## WILLAMETTE PARTNERSHIP

March 4, 2021  
Representative Helm  
House Committee on Water  
Re: Written Testimony in Support of HB 3293

Willamette Partnership submits written testimony in support of HB 3293 to enable existing sources of water funding to support community engagement. Willamette Partnership is a conservation non-profit with a deep commitment to building stronger, healthier, and more equitable communities. We work with communities across Oregon to change how they build infrastructure, protect water sources and critical habitat, and manage farms and forests in ways that strengthen community resilience.

Across the state, Oregonians face complex water challenges. In many communities, water infrastructure is overburdened and there is inadequate water supply to meet growing demand. Changing precipitation patterns and land-use pressures will continue to further exacerbate existing water challenges.

HB 3293 offers a critical piece of the solution: community engagement. Preparing Oregon communities for the future will require investing in water projects that are centered in community voices and rooted in community-identified needs, values, and priorities. HB 3293 helps ensure that water project planning gets community engagement right. It authorizes agencies who fund water projects to make community engagement support available to local organizations and governments, and it directs agencies to develop a set of best practices on equitable and meaningful participation in water project planning and decision-making processes.

**When community members have the opportunity to shape their water future, they can achieve amazing things.** In Tillamook County, community engagement and collaboration resulted in the Southern Flow Corridor, a project that improved habitat, reduced flood damage, saved money, and helped build collaborative capacity in the community, all at the same time.

**When community engagement is inclusive, people show up.** For example, the Oregon Water Futures Project provided financial and translation support to community members interested in sharing community priorities for our shared water resources. As a result, over 100 people in rural and urban communities of color around the state have been willing to share their experience, knowledge and ideas, helping contribute to a vision of how we improve water resilience in the face of environmental disasters and climate change.

**Finally, good engagement helps communities build capacity to solve other issues.** For example, the Ford Family Foundation's work on community building not only led to innovations in economic development, but also built capacity that helped rural communities respond effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Examples like these are why Willamette Partnership supports increasing the community engagement capacity of water infrastructure providers and their partners, as a key path to make informed and equitable water decisions. Together, we can respond to the water challenges we face now, and those to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara O'Brien', written in a cursive style.

Sara O'Brien  
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Willamette Partnership  
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