To: Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery
From: Julia DeGraw, Oregon Conservation Network
Date: April 9, 2021

RE: Support for SB 762 – Wildfire Recovery and Preparedness.

Dear Chair Golden, Vice Chair Heard and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on **SB 762.** On behalf of our thousands of members and supporters in Oregon, we would like to register the Oregon Conservation Network's support to pass comprehensive scientifically sound wildfire policy that uses the state's scarce resources in a way that best protects people's lives and property.

The Oregon Conservation Network (OCN) is coordinated through the Oregon League of Conservation Voters. OCN is a coalition of 37 not-for-profit organizations throughout the state, united to advocate for pro-conservation legislation and to fight policies that threaten our state's natural legacy. OCN is powered by tens of thousands of Oregonians who belong to their membership organizations, the Oregon Environmental Council being one. We work to promote policies that will ensure a better Oregon for our children – and to fight policies that do not.

The 2020 fire season was historic for many reasons: the tragic loss of life; overwhelming loss of homes and infrastructure; and the degree to which fire impacted densely populated areas of our state and not just remote regions.

For the most part the 2020 Labor Day fires were wind, drought, and climate driven events. OCN organizations know that if we are to protect homes, communities, and lives from the effects of fire in the future, that Oregon must look to control the things that we can control and invest in strategies that will maximize the impact of our investment. To us, the evidence is clear that our solutions to wildfire safety and preparedness must start in our communities while prioritizing at-risk populations such as Black Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) and low income communities.

SB 762 is the comprehensive actionable wildfire policy the state of Oregon needs right now. We wholeheartedly support the elements of the bill that will dramatically increase safety for fire prone communities in our state:

- Wildfire risk mapping and a more uniform and rational Wildland Urban Interface map that can help prioritize areas at greatest risk of fire and drive decisions related to land use, defensible space, and more.
- Enhanced and standardized building code requirements statewide that can help harden current and future homes to be more resistant in the face of fire
- Better land use planning to limit the risk of building in places where fire is likely to return
- Increasing the State Fire Marshal's capacity to support defensible space (also known as Home Ignition Zone) work to protect homes and structures from future fires

- A plan for de-energizing power grid infrastructure during extreme weather events and preparing our energy transmission systems to be more resilient in the future

We appreciate that all of these aspects of the bill prioritize the importance of actions in the built environment where we can harden our homes and communities in the face of fires that are certain to come in the future. Especially when these tools and funding are made available to low-income and BIPOC communities, the state will be investing in the highest return-on-investment activities.

In our previous testimony on SB 248, we urged you to provide resources to a Wildfire Workforce Corps and we are pleased to see funding for that program in SB 762. Not only will the work of a Wildfire Workforce Corps help protect people and property from future wildfires (by focusing its efforts in the home ignition zone)—it will create much needed jobs and workforce training for young people in the rural parts of our state.

However, some portions of SB 762 could be improved. In the -2 amendments establishes an Advisory Council, and while the creation of such a group may be effective and useful, as it is currently drafted is problematic in numerous ways. The makeup of the council needs to have an equal balance between local government and public interests, practitioners, and other stakeholders. We urge you to include perspectives on the council from conservation, environmental justice, and public health, groups, as well as from community groups, and tribes. As it is currently written the Advisory Council is not inclusive or representative. It is unacceptable for the Advisory Council to consist of only the Association of Oregon Cities, League of Oregon Cities, special districts, and a couple of fire associations.

<u>We encourage you to consider these issues and potential changes to the Advisory Council:</u>

1. We are concerned about the self appointment authority created in the bill. It is very unconventional, can be problematic, and it innately limits meaningful oversight.
2. Naming organizations in statute as opposed to designating specific interest areas is problematic and fairly unprecedented. What if an organization changes its name or doesn't have someone to represent? This approach limits qualified experts that might represent organizations not explicitly listed in statute. We encourage you to define the different seats as needing to be filled by areas of interest rather than by naming specific organizations.
3. The current makeup doesn't require geographic diversity or distinction between size of jurisdiction – members could all be from tiny towns/rural counties in Eastern OR, or all in big cities/urban counties in the Willamette Valley. <u>We urge you to require geographic diversity be a requirement of the Advisory Council.</u>
4. With the self-appointment authority, there's no guidance about what types of people can be chosen. The committee could effectively lean toward the timber industry, or businesses, or some other interest. As currently written, if each entity chooses whoever they want with no parameters on whose interests they are representing it raises many concerns about the intentions and qualifications of the potential board members.

There is one other area of the bill we are concerned about: the amount of scarce resources this bill would channel to controversial or less effective means of protecting communities. OCN would like to see fewer resources for logging forests across ownership categories with the aim to reduce wildfire on the landscape. For legislation aimed at wildfire recovery, we urge the state to focus on activities scientifically proven to protect people and property from wildfire.

Overall, this bill (SB 762) has been a long time coming—we need this kind of action-oriented comprehensive wildfire policy in order to ensure more resilient infrastructure, the effectiveness of our emergency response, and safer more resilient communities.

In conclusion, the undersigned 37 organizations that comprise the Oregon Conservation Network are supportive of SB 762-1 and urge you to pass it with a "do pass" recommendation out of committee.

Sincerely,

Julia B. DeGraw
Coalition Director
Oregon Conservation Network, and Oregon League of Conservation Voters

Testimony Submitted On behalf of all the OCN Member Organizations:

1000 Friends of Oregon | Association of Oregon Recyclers | Audubon Society of Portland | Beyond Toxics | Cascadia Wildlands | Center for Biological Diversity | Central Oregon Landwatch | Climate Solutions | Defenders of Wildlife | Engineers for a Sustainable Future | The Environmental Center | Environment Oregon | Friends of the Columbia Gorge | Friends of Mt. Hood | Greater Hells Canyon Council | League of Women Voters of Oregon | Native Fish Society | Neighbors for Clean Air | Oceana | Oregon Coast Alliance | Oregon Environmental Council | Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility | Oregon League of Conservation Voters | Oregon Natural Desert Association | Oregon Land and Water Alliance | Oregon Wild | Renewable Northwest | Rogue Riverkeeper | Rogue Valley Audubon Society |Sierra Club Oregon Chapter | Surfrider Foundation | Trout Unlimited | Tualatin Riverkeepers | Umpqua Valley Audubon Society | WaterWatch of Oregon | Wild Salmon Center