



TO: Joint Committee on Ways and Means
FROM: Grace Brahler, Oregon Climate Action Plan & Policy Manager, Beyond Toxics
DATE: April 22, 2021
RE: State Budget for the 2021-23 Biennium

Co-Chairs Senator Johnson, Senator Steiner Hayward, and Representative Rayfield and members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer these comments in regard to the state budget for the 2021-23 biennium. My name is Grace Brahler and I serve as the Oregon Climate Action Plan and Policy Manager for Beyond Toxics, a statewide environmental justice organization advancing policies that ensure meaningful participation and cultivating grassroots leadership from Oregon's frontline and impacted communities. My role involves co-leading the Natural and Working Landscapes tables for the Oregon Climate Action Plan (OCAP) Coalition, which engages at every step of the EO 20-04 implementation process, working to ensure the strongest possible outcomes for our climate, our communities, and our economy. I want to encourage the Joint Committee to fully fund state natural resource, health and environmental protection, and energy agencies working to address the climate crisis, center equity, and build resilient communities.

It was my great privilege and honor to join the Eugene community in 2017 to attend the University of Oregon's nationally ranked environmental law program. While I had long dreamt of living amongst the snow-capped mountains, rocky coastlines, and towering trees of the Pacific Northwest, I was quickly oriented to the struggles Oregonians face being surrounded by those breathtaking landscapes. My first memories of law school include not only shockingly long reading assignments but the thick blanket of smoke that cloaked Eugene due to the forest fires that [surrounded us](#) too. In addition to talking with new friends about how we were going to survive our first "cold calls," we confided in each other about the [respiratory distress](#) we experienced as we commuted to class and spent our study breaks taping up cracks along the windows of our rooms.

My peers and I were undoubtedly amongst the most privileged encountering these wildfire impacts. For example, we had shelter, while our unhoused neighbors, many of whom belong to the LGBTQ+ community, did not. We had access to healthcare, as many Latinx and migrant workers exposed to smoke and excessive heat did not. Because of a long history of exclusion and discrimination, the communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis are the least able to withstand its impacts. The [needs of historically disadvantaged communities](#), such as access to information, healthcare, and other forms of aid, must be meaningfully considered and prioritized as we plan for the future.

Fast forward to the unprecedented 2020 wildfire season that exposed many of us to record levels of extremely hazardous air quality, leveled communities, and threatened drinking water supplies. As we

prepare for a future of natural disasters worsened by climate change, it now seems that “unprecedented” has simply become what is to be expected. It is our collective duty to ensure that everyone will be adequately prepared in the future--especially the most vulnerable. So, as we work together to support communities recovering from the incomprehensible trauma of recent fire seasons and chart a path forward, I implore you to adequately fund the projects and positions that will enable our communities to be resilient in the face of climate change and the natural disasters, increased exposure to toxics, and detrimental impacts to our watersheds that accompany it.

I ask specifically that you thoughtfully consider and approve needed funding for agency efforts that align with the Governor’s Climate Action Plan (EO 20-04). Agencies must be ready to navigate the challenges of the climate crisis, yet they are chronically underfunded while their staff are overstretched. The Oregon Global Warming Commission has the monumental task before it of establishing the Natural and Working Landscapes goal for Oregon per EO 20-04. Please make adequate resources available to OGWC and the aforementioned NWL agencies so that they have the capacity to implement the laws and policies necessary to implement the vision of climate and equity advanced by the Oregon Climate Action Plan.

In sum, I encourage you to fully fund state natural resource, health and environmental protection, and energy agencies working to address the climate crisis, center equity, and build resilient communities. Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

Grace Brahler, Oregon Climate Action Plan & Policy Manager

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