

Chair Wagner and members of the committee,

My name is Blake Whitson and I am the Oregon State Elks Association Vice President for the North Central District and a Past Exalted Ruler of the Salem Elks Lodge. Thank you for the chance to speak before you today and for taking the time to consider this resolution. I also want to thank Representative Moore-Green for sponsoring this resolution recognizing the Salem Elks Lodge in recognition of its 125th anniversary and the work it does in the Salem Community. I come before you today to speak in favor of this resolution honor the Salem Elks lodge and it's numerous contributions to the Salem Community. The Elks have been serving communities in Oregon since 1889 with the first Oregon lodge in Portland. The Salem lodge was instituted a few years later in 1896 and since its founding has given back well over \$17 million in support to those in need in the Salem Community. Throughout our lodges history we have supported veterans, disaster relief, provided Christmas memories to countless area children, and supported countless more in pursuing their educational dreams through our scholarship program. Just this past week, our national organization released its charitable giving report and Oregon Elks Lodges ranked 5th in the nation for charitable giving with over \$9.3 million donated from Oregon's 52 lodges. Salem lodged alone was responsible for a quarter of a million dollars of that total. And we achieved this even with the challenges we faced last year from being shut down much of the year due to COVID-19, the wildfires that impacted our region, as well as ice storms. Over the last year we delivered over 80 welcome home boxes to veterans transitioning to stable housing from homelessness filled with essential household supplies. We aided those impacted by the wildfires, including pet displaced by the fires. Donated to organizations serving essential workers during the peak of the COVID pandemic. Provided Christmas presents for the children of veteran and national guard members. Supported students and their families at the Oregon School for the Deaf. And so much more. In the year ahead we look forward to celebrating our 125th anniversary and continuing our charitable activities and giving back even more to the Salem community through our various charitable projects and community events. I would invite any of you to our lodge anytime to learn more about us and what we do in our community.