

House Committee on Business and Labor

Testimony in Support of HB 4113

February 2, 2022

Chair Holvey, Vice-Chairs Bonham & Grayber,  
Representatives Boshart Davis, Bynum, Cate, Evans,  
George, Salinas, Smith Warner, and Witt,

For the record, my name is Natasha Haunsperger, and I am Chair of the [Oregon Commission for Women](#). I am also an officer with the Portland Police Bureau. I am testifying today to support House Bill 4113 which adds to cancers covered under presumed occupational diseases for firefighters.

1. OCFW works toward economic, social, political, and legal equity for the women of Oregon with particular focus on marginalized and underrepresented women of color. We do this through advocacy, public policy research, leadership development, and partnerships.

2. In our statutory role of bringing equity focus and community voice into Oregon policy making, OCFW strongly supports HB 4113.

Firefighting is a noble public service and is a dangerous one. I work alongside some amazing Portland Fire Bureau firefighters, and I witness firsthand an extraordinary degree of daily exposure to many toxins and cancerous elements. Such daily exposure adds up over years and decades, taking a toll on our firefighters' health, quality of life and, honestly, their life longevity.

**Oregon Commission for Women**

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Natasha Haunsperger

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In 2018, Congress tasked the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to develop a database of health and occupational information to track and analyze cancer in the fire occupation. This shift in medical and scientific recognition of the negative impacts on firefighter health was critical to gain data-informed understanding on the cancer related trends as a part of the occupational health of firefighters. The CDC found that firefighters are 9% more likely to be diagnosed with cancer and 14% more likely to die from cancer than the general population.<sup>1</sup>

While evidence shows that some cancer diagnoses of male firefighters are categorized and recognized under the occupational health umbrella coverage, sadly, Oregon women firefighters continue to experience gender health inequities. Because women make up less than 10% of firefighters in the United States<sup>2</sup>, research and data collection on cancer rates of women firefighters is scarce, as the primary focus remains on male firefighters.

As a female first responder, I am disheartened to learn that our state does not recognize such vital aspects of women's reproductive rights and health care and fails to provide our female firefighters with basic access to coverage, protection, and health care justice under the occupational health framework.

In 2018, Boston firefighters succeeded in advocating for the passage of a Massachusetts bill that included breast and reproductive cancers into the cancer presumption list to protect women firefighters.<sup>3</sup> HB 4113 is proposing such policy expansion in Oregon and aims to eradicate this specific health care inequity and provide a platform for such desperately needed research related to this specific issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniels, Robert D, PHD, CHP. Centers for Disease Control. "[Firefighter Cancer Rates: The Facts from NIOSH Research.](#)" May 10, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Lugo, Dianne. "[Portland Metro Fire Camp returns, encourages more women to join the fire service.](#)" Salem Statesman Journal, Aug. 2, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Mazurek, Marek. "[Governor Baker signs bill to designate cancer as work-related injury for state's firefighters.](#)" Boston Globe, Jul. 24, 2018.



Firefighters sacrifice their health to protect our communities. Supporting HB 4113 is an acknowledgement of their service and imperative for advancing gender and health equities and inclusion.

As Chair of the Oregon Commission for Women and a female first responder, I am firmly endorsing and supporting this bill and hope that our State will join national efforts to advocate and fight for the health care equity of female firefighters by expanding the existing cancer presumption program and platform.

Sincerely,



Katarina Hanyes

Chair of the Oregon Commission for Women

