

February 7, 2022

To: Committee Chair Golden, Vice Chair Kennener, and committee members, I am providing written testimony in support of SB 1582.

Currently under Oregon State Law, the citizens do not have a choice to decide whether to pay our school board, municipal, and state taxes. However, citizens can choose not to join a local Rural Fire Protection District, thus not paying taxes to the Fire District. As we have seen more fires due to climate change, sharp increases of operational costs, lower volunteerism, and fire districts are struggling to collect enough funds to support local emergency responses. How is it allowed that people can still choose to decline services, not pay taxes, and still be allowed to receive emergency services?

When a 911 call comes in, we do not have the time to decipher whether someone is a paying citizen or not. Additionally, 911 dispatch centers are also already overwhelmed and cannot determine before dispatching the fire district whether someone is a taxpayer or not. When lives are at stake, we jump and respond, possibly to assist non-tax paying citizens. This adds a significant burden to not only our fire district, but also current tax paying customers. Why should our current taxpayers subsidize the costs for non-tax paying citizens?

As most Rural Fire Protection Districts are located in the Wildland-Urban Interface areas inequities are expanded. Why should properties that have not paid taxes to the local fire districts have the same protection through the State of Oregon's Conflagration act as well as the same amount of available resources?

As a small Fire District with already limited funds, we cannot support the attitude of "just bill me" that some non-taxpayers have. It takes funds to plan infrastructure and to cover the operational costs of our fleet and personnel. There is even costs for Volunteer Fire Districts that must be covered annually. If everyone took the stance of "Bill me for Service" we would have zero funds to prepare for and to respond to emergencies.

I respectfully ask that you support SB 1582 and pass it out of committee and support it on the chamber floor. We should all support our emergency responder who are on the front line of fire, medical, and disaster response and help ensure that everyone getting the services of these responders support the infrastructure to ensure they are available when they are needed.

Sincerely,



W.Scott McKnight  
Deputy Fire Chief, Calapooia Rural Fire District.