

Testimony in support of HB 4140, expanding OGEC's responsibilities and requiring training, submitted by Yamhill County Commissioner Casey Kulla:

“Good morning, chair, co-chair, members of the committee, and staff. Thank you for considering HB 4140. I am a Yamhill County Commissioner but I speak for myself.

I hope you will move this bill forward. Our constituents expect transparency and they expect a path to accountability when they see violations of our commitments to transparency. 4140 expands the responsibility of OGEC to listen to the concerns of Oregon residents about public meetings laws, and especially about executive sessions. It is true, now, that if a public body violates our transparency laws, an Oregonian can challenge them in a court of law. But, very few people have the financial ability to do this.

You have a model in other state agencies like BOLI, where the agency is the first step and does not preclude an aggrieved Oregonian from filing suit. This model lowers the bar for seeking accountability and justice, and I would ask you to adopt this model and give OGEC responsibility as stated in the bill for public meetings.

Next, no one is perfect, and especially not elected officials. We cannot be expected to know everything, and requiring public meetings laws training is an excellent way to make sure every elected official knows what is expected of them.

Next, I've heard concerns that giving Oregonians easier ability to file complaints would gum up and grind to a halt governing bodies. While I doubt that, except when residents see egregious situations, remember that the process at OGEC is multi-part, and a complaint will undergo review and Director approval before even going to the Commission before even going to an investigation. Each step provides the opportunity to drop the complaint. Adopting this expanded capacity for OGEC will result in greater transparency without harming local governments.

Finally: you in your legislative capacity allocate billions of dollars that go to local government. And you should be able to establish minimum standards for transparency and accountability, for use of that money. Thank you for your time and for supporting this bill in pursuit of transparency and accountability.”