



April 18, 2023

Dear Chair Helm, Vice-Chair Owens and Vice-Chair Hartman, and members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water,

Thank you for the opportunity today to testify in support of HB 3124, specifically item 3-6. My name is Kristin Anderson Ostrom and I'm executive director of Oregon Rural Action, a community-led organization that has been working for safe drinking water in the Lower Umatilla Basin for more than a year.

Last June, Morrow County declared a water emergency and asked for the state's assistance based on local testing of domestic wells that found up to 5 times the federal standard for safe drinking water. The state's assistance has been slow to come to the residents of the Lower Umatilla Basin. To date, 84 percent of the Basin's domestic wells still need to be tested.

As we testified in September 2022 to the Interim Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, and Water and as reported in the January 2023 Secretary of State's special audit report on water, community members in the Basin have unknowingly been drinking, cooking and boiling the water for decades and self report health concerns exposed to consuming water with high nitrate levels.

Nitrate is a dangerous substance. It is colorless, odorless, tasteless, and can be particularly harmful to infants by causing Blue Baby Syndrome. Nitrate has also been linked to miscarriage, birth defects, thyroid issues, and a laundry list of cancers, including renal, bladder, colorectal, and even pediatric brain cancers, among others.

These rural residents have been waiting almost a year for the State's emergency response to begin and for the resources needed to quickly test every well, inform the public that the water may be unsafe, and provide free water until a permanent safe source can be found. In July 2022, the EPA detailed these minimum requirements for an adequate state-coordinated emergency response. HB 3124, component 3-6, offers initial resources to meet this long-overdue need for the people of the Lower Umatilla Basin.

Based on testing trends to date, we estimate \$11 million in funding is needed during this biennium to fund the states coordinated emergency response in the Basin. This minimum estimate includes at least \$3 million per year for providing safe water for affected homes. Given the level of nitrate, it is likely that this investment in safe water will be required for many years, perhaps decades.

Oregonians in the Lower Umatilla Basin have been exposed to unsafe water for decades. They deserve access to safe water now, and they deserve investments in securing the basic human right to safe water in the future.

Sincerely,
Kristin Anderson Ostrom
Executive Director, Oregon Rural Action