



February 8, 2023

Chair Helm, Vice-Chair Hartman, Vice-Chair Owens, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Community Action Partnership of Oregon (CAPO), I would like to express our strong support for House Bill 3125, which will establish the Public Drinking Water and Sewer Ratepayer Assistance Fund, distributing much needed state financial assistance for water and sewer bill payment for low-income households.

In 2021, through federal funding, Oregon received just under \$14 million dollars to provide low-income households with financial assistance for their drinking water and wastewater bills. Our statewide network of community action agencies is currently working within communities and in collaboration with local water systems throughout the state to provide this assistance and help prevent water shut-offs due to accrual of late payments.

In a short amount of time, our network has set up hundreds of contracts with community water systems and wastewater systems throughout the state. As of today, our network has distributed \$5 million to assist more than 9,500 families and over 25,700 individuals. Given the tremendous need we are seeing in communities, we expect that funds will be spent down by the end of September. Unfortunately, Congress has not renewed the funding and the program is set to end without a state investment.

This bill will take advantage of the hard work undertaken to establish a program to distribute water and sewer bill payment assistance and build on the initial federal investment with critical state financial assistance. It would use lessons learned from the federal program and expand access to Oregonians currently ineligible for assistance who live in multi-family dwellings and pay for water bundled with rent.

In closing, we would urge you to support House Bill 3125 and build on the success of the existing program, that has been providing a crucial service to many low-income Oregonians in communities throughout this state. As a network, we are committed to continuing to work closely with partners in communities throughout the state to prevent individuals from losing essential services, like drinking water and wastewater, in today's challenging post-pandemic environment.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Janet Allanach
Executive Director, Community Action Partnership of Oregon