Testimony to the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Lands and Water
On HB 3125

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council strongly supports HB 3125. We are pleased to see the showing of support from utilities and others for this important bill.

HB 3125 would establish the Public Drinking Water and Sewer Ratepayer Assistance Fund (PDWSRAF). This state-supported fund would continue the important work of Oregon's Low-Income Water & Sewer Assistance Program as the federal funding for that program ends in 2023. The PDWSRAF will pick up when the federal funding ends.

As administrators of the Fund, Oregon Housing and Community Services would allocate the Fund's resources to community-based non-profits, housing authorities, community action agencies, and public utilities. These groups would, in turn, distribute the funds to low-income and at-risk ratepayers, including renters.

Establishing a state-supported fund to assist utilities in providing ratepayer relief for drinking water and wastewater is an important part of Oregon's commitment to addressing homelessness and housing insecurity. Ratepayers who fall behind on utility payments are vulnerable to shut-offs, which in turn decrease their ability to stay housed.

Utilities cannot deal with the increasing needs for ratepayer assistance alone. Because drinking water and wastewater utilities are funded by ratepayers, any rate relief provided to some will increase rates for the rest of the utility clients while decreasing the utility's ability to invest in infrastructure and other system upgrades.

OEC urges the committee to pass HB 3125.