



March 10, 2023

To: House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
900 Court Street NE, HR D
Salem, OR 97301

From: Oregon Association of Water Utilities,
Oregon Water Utility Council of the America Water Works Association,
Special District Association of Oregon,
and the League of Oregon Cities

RE: In Support of House Bill 3321 – Small Water System Study and Training Center

Chair Helm, Vice Chairs Owens and Hartman, and Committee Members,

The Oregon Association of Water Utilities (OAWU), the Oregon Water Utilities Council (OWUC), the League of Oregon Cities (LOC) and Special Districts Association (SDAO), are writing in support of House Bill 3321.

There are approximately 3,321 public water systems in Oregon, the majority of which are small community water systems (CWSs) providing drinking water to 3,330 people or less. These smaller systems struggle with multiple challenges including maintaining regulatory and compliance standards, ensuring water supply reliability, aging infrastructure, climate change, water and sewer rates and ensuring financial stability, and, accessing assistance to name a few.

HB 3321 addresses two significant challenges facing smaller water and wastewater systems. 1.) By ensuring a pipeline of trained and qualified operators to run these systems and 2.) that their governing boards or councils receive the necessary training so that they can fulfill their duties and responsibility to their communities and customers.

Drinking water operators, especially small system operators, are in high demand as the aging workforce retires. Lack of opportunities to enter the trade have resulted in too few replacement operators to fill those vacancies. Furthermore, many of these small system operators are recruited to operate larger systems as they gain experience. As a result, smaller systems have greater difficulty staying or remaining in compliance. This inability to keep qualified and trained personnel impacts the ability of the utility to operate smoothly, plan for future system improvements, address system challenges, undertake utility rate studies, and provide safe drinking water and environmental health to Oregon citizens. OAWU is a nonprofit association of water and wastewater utilities that provides small and rural water systems with onsite technical assistance in the areas of drinking water quality, environmental protection, and public health compliance.

House Bill 3321 requires OAWU to conduct a study of the needs and vulnerabilities of small CWSs covering several topics. The study will cover smaller CWS supply reliability, source and treated water quality, operations and management and infrastructure among others. The bill also dedicates \$2 million to OAWU for the design and construction of a water utility training center located in Independence, Oregon to provide technical, financial, and managerial support and resources to these smaller community water and wastewater systems.

In summary, we are committed to ensuring our smaller water and wastewater systems are being operated by trained personnel who can provide regulatory compliance, adequate capital planning, and are using best management practices to deliver these essential services to Oregonians.

We respectfully urge your support for HB 3321.

Jason Green, Executive Director, OAWU

Jessica Dorsey, Chair, OWUC

Mark Landauer, SDAO

Michael Martin, League of Oregon Cities