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Testimony in Support of HB 3486, Schools as Earthquake Relief Shelters

To: House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans  
Chair Grayber, Vice Chairs Lewis and Tran, and members of the Committee

HB 3486 and its proposed amendment would codify needed seismic and resilience design standards for public schools and community colleges in Oregon. This will improve safety for students and staff in new and retrofitted public school buildings K-12 and community colleges, by increasing seismic design standards.

Further It will provide infrastructure to support temporary emergency shelters for communities in the event of a major earthquake or other natural disaster by mandating certain design features for large rooms in new schools. This design criteria will be matching those required for emergency response facilities that must remain operational immediately after a large earthquake or other disaster.

This is responsible stewardship protecting the public's investment, a one-time expense, covering the entire life of each building.

Schools serve as gathering places for people after natural disasters. They are distributed throughout neighborhoods and generally could be reached by community members even if transportation systems have failed after the Cascadia earthquake or other catastrophic event, as the Oregon Resilience Plan predicts. However, for schools to provide effective shelter spaces, basic resilience features must be designed into the large rooms, which could then also be available for all hazards, not just earthquakes.

Benefits:

1. Enhances safety for students and staff in high-risk earthquake regions.
2. Ensures that the new school buildings will be habitable and repairable after a major earthquake.
3. Provides the community with functional emergency shelter spaces after any natural disaster.

Cost Impact:

1. Marginal cost increases for new construction are expected to be minimal. Estimated Cost Increases for school buildings previously designed to these standards have been +1% to +2%

This initiative has been recognized by the American Society of Civil Engineers, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and others. It is time for these targeted standards to be applied in all new public school and community college construction projects located in Oregon's high seismic risk regions.

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