
March 20, 2023

House Committee On Climate, Energy, and Environment
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Marsh, Vice-Chairs Levy and Levy, and members of the Committee:

As climate-related disasters continue to increase in frequency, duration and severity, it is clear that Oregonians need additional support preparing for, responding to and recovering from crisis events. This, in addition to natural disasters, pandemics, and the looming threat of a Cascadia earthquake, make emergency preparedness a top priority for all Oregonians.

Over the past several years, Oregonians across the state have experienced crisis events that stretched state and local emergency management services beyond their capacity and subjected Oregonians to myriad health effects.

In 2020, Multnomah County residents were placed under a statewide air quality advisory for over 5 days due to wildfire smoke. The smoke resulted in the worst air quality recorded in Multnomah County since the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality began monitoring in 1985. For five consecutive days, Multnomah County saw emergency room visits for asthma-like symptoms that far exceed normal levels, increasing by 45 to 50 additional visits on each day of high smoke. The effects of wildfire smoke were felt across the state; Southern Oregon was most impacted with over five weeks of wildfire smoke.

During the June 2021 Pacific Northwest heat dome, nearly 100 Oregonians died from hyperthermia. Of those deaths, 72 occurred in Multnomah County alone, where in a typical year there are zero. Total emergency room and urgent care visits in Multnomah County more than tripled in 2021, with 257 visits recorded versus 83 in a typical year. Meanwhile, in Jefferson County, temperatures reached a high of 119 degrees--a temperature not recorded in the state of Oregon since 1898.

In September of 2022 high wind warnings, hot temperatures, and dangerously dry conditions led to public safety power shutoffs in Multnomah County and other areas of the state. These intentional power curtailments are meant to reduce the risk of accidental fire starts from sparking power lines, but result in substantial disruptions for impacted residents. During this period Multnomah County activated resource centers to distribute supplies like ice to help minimize food loss and offered residents a place to charge devices and other powered devices like powered medical devices.

In response to these and other crisis events, such as the pandemic, Commissioner Lori Stegmann convened a workgroup of 12 community-based organizations serving East Multnomah County ("East County"). Communities residing in East County face disproportionate impacts from climate-caused events due to disparities in the social determinants of health, including prevalence of chronic illness, poverty, houselessness, environmental conditions such as heat islands due to a lack of tree canopy, language isolation, historical deprivation of public services, and other factors. To address these disparities

and the disproportionate impact of climate-related crises on East County communities, the workgroup identified the need for a Resilience Hub as a critical component of building and sustaining community resilience. The group determined that planning and building a resilience hub would enhance resilience and mitigate future disaster impacts by supporting the development of a service provider network to support the community during a disaster; building economic, health and social resilience; and ensuring access to critical services to cope with ongoing and future climate disasters.

House Bill 2990 would provide the necessary funding for local communities to plan and build resilience strategies that make sense for their community. Building local resilience is a critical component of any climate crisis preparedness plan. By adapting to our changing climate and preparing for future climate crisis events, lives will be saved. Local resilience hubs will also reduce the burden placed upon the state and local government emergency response systems, and communities will be better prepared with access to life-saving resources.

Investing in our state's ability to prepare for, respond to and recover from crisis events is critical to the long term safety and wellbeing of all Oregonians. The time to act is now. We urge the passage of HB 2990.

Sincerely,



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