

March 25, 2023

Committee Chair Meek, Vice Chair Boquist, and committee members, I am providing written testimony in support of SB 1068.

Under current ORS's and OAR's, a property owner throughout Oregon can choose not to be in a Rural Fire Protection District. Property owners do not have a choice on school, county, or law enforcement taxes. For many reasons outlined here, and more, these rules need to be updated and aligned with other taxing authority regulations in an effort to stabilize District funding and operational logistics. These funds are important to support the amount of fire and emergency service infrastructure available to protect and support the citizens of Douglas County and other parts of Oregon.

Currently, property owners within the fire district boundaries may not be incorporated into the district. This overly complicates emergency responses to these areas. There may be a group of houses or subdivisions where three or four residences are incorporated into the fire district and two or three are not part of any fire district. This makes it very difficult for fire districts when responding to fire and medical emergencies to know which residences are covered and which ones are not when every second counts during an emergency.

Most Rural Fire Protection Districts cover Wildland-Urban Interface Lands and the issues and inequities are exaggerated. There are properties that have not supported the fire district, yet they get the same response through conflagration as all other properties. It would be great if the additional funding provided to the Rural Fire Protection Districts were able to improve the infrastructure through equipment, personnel, and/or training that could have reduced the threats before they occur. There should be a fair and equitable way to support the infrastructure of emergency services. I believe this bill accomplishes that goal.

I respectfully ask that you support SB 1068 and pass it out of committee and support it on the chamber floor. I believe we should all support our emergency responders who are on the front line of fire, medical, and disaster responses. This bill helps ensure that everyone gets the services of these first responders when they are needed.

Respectfully submitted,



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