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March 31, 2023

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE Salem Oregon 97301

Re: HB 3124 – Support

Chair Helm, Vice Chair Hartman, Vice Chair Owens, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 3124, the Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security Package. For the record, my name is Cheyenne Holliday, and I am the water justice coordinator at Verde. We are a community-based organization that serves communities by building environmental wealth. We work with communities across the state to lift up their personal experiences and stories to bring their voices to water policy and decision making processes.

We have worked with the Oregon Water Futures Collaborative to engage with hundreds community members across the state to produce the Oregon Water Futures Report and Policy Action Framework. The Water Justice Policy Action Framework identified six community driven priorities: Indigenous water justice leadership, renter's rights, water access and affordability, natural and built infrastructure for clean water, emergency preparedness, and community empowerment. We feel that some of these priorities are reflected in HB 3124.

The package has many important components, but we would like to express our support for the following specific elements:

- Building community capacity for environmental justice communities to engage on water in Component 1-5 and providing grants for community-based organizations to facilitate learning and communications about water in Component 7-5. Investing in community capacity is crucial as it opens pathways for more equitable laws, policies, and projects that serve communities. We have heard from hundreds of community members across

the state about their interest in learning more about water and how to be involved in water policy, we feel that these two components begin to address these interests.

- Funding for culturally appropriate flooding and water-related notification systems in Component 7-3. Over the past three years, community members have shared that emergency notifications and resources during emergency events are not accessible for various reasons, most importantly, that notifications need to be translated into various languages and produced by trusted sources. Emergency notifications and resources are intertwined with water justice issues, especially for community members living on the frontlines of disaster and climate impacts. As Oregon will continue to face climate challenges in the coming years, this will support the communities who need to be alerted first and supported the most.
- Funding for small and very small water systems is also a priority for Oregonians on the frontline of water justice issues. Assessing and addressing vulnerabilities of small and very small water systems in Component 3-3 and clarifying that funding can be used for small community water systems in domestic and community well assistance in Component 3-4 address this. Low-income rural communities experience the most drinking water violations and, in many areas, they cannot finance the needed water infrastructure upgrades because of their small customer base. We support this component and hope that the application processes for these funds will be simplified and easy to use for communities to access them.

Verde urges the committee to support HB 3124, the Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security Package. Thank you for your time,

Cheyenne Holliday

Water Justice Coordinator, Verde