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April 6, 2023

To: **Co-Chairs Sen. Dembrow and Rep. Pham and Members of the Committee**  
**[Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources](#)**

Re: **[HB 5043](#) – Dept. of Water Resources Budget – Support with Comments**

The League has strong positions on both water quality and quantity. We have studied water issues since 1969. We had a seat on the original Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRS) Policy Advisory Group and the latest update work. Members attend Water Resources Commission meetings and work group meetings. As a result of that window into the department's responsibilities, **we provide testimony today in support of the General Fund and Lottery Fund request for the base budget/activities and for additions to help this department meet its important mission:** "To serve the public by practicing and promoting responsible water management through two key goals: To directly address Oregon's water supply needs; To restore and protect streamflows and watersheds in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of Oregon's ecosystems, economy, and quality of life."

**A reminder: "All water within the State from all sources of water belongs to the public."** With the infusion of significant resources in 2021 and 2022, the League supports the reorganization of the agency in order to address both water management and policy implementation. The League was actively engaged in the modernization of both the dam safety and well programs and we continue to support that work.

For 2023, **we support the Governor's Recommended Budget, with modifications.** And we are supportive of a number of policy bills that will help direct this agency as it works to fulfill its mission. Of importance to the League include:

**POP 101:** \$371k GF with 1 FTE to assure that the IWRS continues to be implemented; that the IWRS be updated and that there is a staffer to coordinate with other IWRS-related agencies and report to the legislature on positive movement of the strategy. The [2017-2022 IWRS Progress Report.pdf \(oregon.gov\)](#) submitted to the legislature early in the session was among the most helpful guides to connecting all the water agencies' responsibilities under the IWRS. **This report should be updated every biennium and that can only happen with a staffer dedicated to retrieving the information from the multiple agencies.** Rep. Bobby Levy's well-worn copy of the IWRS was an indication of the value of the document and the need to be sure it continues to address the most current water issues. Her note that the Conservation Plan Guidance may need updating should be heard. Most of all, we need those Plans themselves to be up to date. **Water conservation must be a major focus of Oregon's water future.**

**POP 105:** \$15.9 million carry over of ARPA funds. We must not leave this money unspent.

**POP 107:** Feasibility Studies, water projects and wells. This POP includes \$1 million GF linked to the new well fund—a fund the League aggressively supported in 2021 and believes it is critical for our rural Oregonians to deal with repairs or replacements to assure safe drinking water.

**POP 111:** \$1.3 million GF, 3.26 FTE to secure additional data. Echoing Rep. Owens, without data, decisions have been made that do not accurately reflect the true state of our water availability.

**POP 115:** \$1.5 million GF for facilitation to address water rights with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. **However, we support adding to this request so the agency can address additional complex issues needing facilitation.** Our Deschutes local League is an active participant in the Deschutes Basin Water Collaborative and would want the state League to support continued facilitation and **studying of the springs in the Deschutes basin.** With population increase and agricultural demands, all areas of the Deschutes need to be carefully managed and accurate data collected to assure “abundant clean water for all” as is stated in the IWRS.

**Reductions:** We are most concerned that positions will be left unfilled to address the requirement to leave positions open. Staff may leave the agency, providing for a vacancy savings opportunity, but that staff’s job may be critical to the agency mission. So, we hope that the agency will work with LFO and the Governor’s Office to assure that any vacancies required to be left open do not diminish the agency’s work.

The reductions include monies for **work on evapotranspiration projects, for water measurement, groundwater study work, and gaging stations.** All of these areas relate to that need for data that is critical for this agency to administer permits and do long-term planning for Oregon’s water needs.

As we listened to the informational hearings, we want to note Sen. Dembrow’s questions around the nexus between our land use planning program and this agency’s water data: **The League believes strongly that counties need additional data to be able to make good land use decisions related to water availability when authorizing rural development. This is why groundwater data is so important.**

We appreciated the exchange with Sen. Frederick on how to replace old infrastructure when that infrastructure is privately owned. In some cases, the current owner might have the resources to do so, but in other cases, that is not so. **We need to find ways to get badly degraded infrastructure repaired or replaced** when it is in the best interests of the state.

We want to recognize the admonition of Acting Director Woodcock that the administrative functions of the agency cannot be underfunded. Human Resources, IT support (staff, hardware and software), accounting, auditing, staff training, and internal/external communications are all needed to assure this agency can be successful.

Lastly, we note the number of policy bills that are currently in Ways and Means or may well arrive here. **We hope you consider favorably [HB 3163](#), the Place-Based Planning bill.** The League participated in the HB 5006 Work Group that provided significant input into this bill.

We also support elements of [HB 3124](#), the Water Scarcity and Drought Package. Although we recognize that the entire \$250 million package cannot be funded in 2023, we see it as a road map and **encourage your consideration of the data elements.** That, too, was a recommendation from the HB 5006 Work Group.

We sincerely thank you for considering our extensive testimony on this agency's budget. We understand that this agency, unlike many natural resource agencies, relies heavily on the General Fund. **Unless we can find another source of funding, we urge the legislature to recognize the value of this agency's work and fund it appropriately.** We are available to discuss each request and look forward to seeing continuing progress from this agency in 2023.

**We urge your Support for HB 5043 with additions to continue the work started in 2021 toward truly managing Oregon's water supply.**

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.



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