



OREGON STATE FIRE FIGHTERS COUNCIL

International Association of Fire Fighters
AFL-CIO CLC

House Committee on Rules
Chair Rep Julie Fahey
Vice Chair Rep Jeff Helfrich
Vice Chair Rep Jason Kropf

February 13, 2024

Re: House Bill 4075 Testimony

Madame Chair, Vice Chairs and Rules Committee,

For the record my name is Karl Koenig, from the Oregon State Fire Fighters Council. We represent the 3700 career fire fighters, paramedics, Wildland, and prevention professionals across Oregon.

Today we are testifying in favor of HB 4075. This Bill would create a task force to plan and advise the Legislative Assembly on where and how to spend the monies created in HJR 201 referendum to Oregon Voters.

The representation on this task force is made up from our fire service partners, elected officials to develop priorities and direction to improve mitigation of fuels, suppression, and prevention across the entire state of Oregon.

While taxes are often seen as another inefficient example of spending money, this proposal is focused on a real issue across the entire state. Fires and their effect on every Oregonian are indeed real. Whether your home was one of the 2500 that burned down in the Phoenix Urban Conflagration, you lost entire crops in the largest of field fires in Sherman or Gilliam County's or a house fire in Portland you know the effects fire have on you as an individual. Unfortunately, these occurrences are on the increase, larger more costly and more impactful to every Oregonian.

The Oregon Fire Service is challenged with a dwindling resources and personnel against the realism of increased requests for our services. We, like every other governmental entity experienced Measure 5 in 1990, along with Measures 47 and 49 limitations in 1996. Those tax realities are relevant today and part of this Task Force responsibilities.

Another reality in this proposal is that almost 50% of all of Oregon fire districts operate on some form of a renewable levy to keep personnel on duty to meet population growth and requests for service. This Task Force is aware of the pressures of all fire departments and districts to serve the public in their time of need. The challenge is now upon us to consider non-traditional ways to pay for it.

This “outside the box” thinking is driven from a very expensive endeavor, firefighting and mitigation, impacts the General Fund. The pressures on the General Fund are enormous, we are attempting to lessen the reliance on GF dollars with this tax. This proposal applies the “fairness doctrine” to the idea we all have a vested interest in keeping small fires small. Mitigate fuels in the forest and provide live saving care in the event of some other catastrophic event. All these challenges are not the fault of property tax limitations, pension costs or inefficient government. They are directly accountable of more people living in Oregon, specifically where they did not used to live, weather effects and forest management. This 2024 problem was not contemplated in 1980’s when property tax reform was the focus of politics at the time in Oregon. Very different times deserve different solutions.

HB 4075 gives the taxpayer accountability in the make-up of the proposed task force and the proper individuals on the committee the charge of impacting the fire problem in Oregon.

Please vote YES in Rules Committee for HB 4075