

Chair Meek, Vice-Chair Boquist, members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 1593. My name is Emily Stebbins, and I'm from Portland. I have lived in Oregon for most of my life — I grew up in this place, and now I count myself lucky to raise my family here.

I am writing as a parent and teacher who cares deeply about community health and forest health. The Fire Safe Communities bill has the potential to protect both. We need stable funding to protect our homes and communities from fire. This bill could do this by protecting the health of the forests we love, and keeping their wealth in the communities that care for them.

I realized the urgency of this issue in the summer of 2020, when wildfire smoke blew the air quality in Portland off the charts. Our four year old's preschool was closed due to smoke. At night, he slept on our floor because his bedroom leaked more of the outside air than ours. I was teaching remotely because of COVID, and had to cancel our P.E. dance party because it could damage our lungs to exert ourselves, even inside our houses. The forests we love were burning, and it was hurting us.

Heavily thinned, immature forests, logged on a short cycle to maximize short-term profits, are uniquely vulnerable to fire. The fire-safe communities bill would tax timber harvests. The severance tax would provide funds to reduce wildfire risk to homes, communities and watersheds. This would mitigate some of the increased fire risk that comes from logging.

We must create fair and equitable wildfire solutions. It is right that the corporate entities contributing to and profiting from the problem, should be part of the solution. Smaller landholders need pay little to nothing. In addition, if we created a tax incentive to grow trees for longer — a reduced tax rate for folks who cared for the forest by harvesting on a longer cycle — our state would have more healthy, mature forests. These forests would be resilient in the face of summer heat, drought, and fire.

Thank you for your time and your hard work on this issue.

Emily Stebbins