



4145 NE Cully Blvd., Portland, OR, 97630 | 503-290-8570

January 22, 2025

To: Co-Chairs Helm and Owens, Vice-chair McDonald and members of the House Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water Committee

**Re: HB 2168 – Support**

House Ag, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water,

Verde is a community-based organization whose mission is to build environmental wealth through organizing, advocacy, and social enterprise. We are writing to express our strong support for HB2168. This bill is critical for addressing the water and wastewater infrastructure challenges faced by many rural Oregonians. It provides much-needed funding for the Well Abandonment, Repair, and Replacement Fund (WARRF) and the Onsite Septic Financial Aid Program, ensuring communities can maintain access to safe, reliable water and wastewater systems.

**Groundwater is a Vital Resource for Oregon**

Almost half of Oregon’s population depends on groundwater for their daily needs. Additionally, 88% of the state’s public water systems rely on groundwater as a primary or backup drinking water source, according to the Oregon Health Authority. As surface water supplies decline and the costs of treating surface water increase, reliance on groundwater will only grow.

Improperly abandoned wells and failing septic systems pose serious risks to groundwater quality. HB 2168 supports critical efforts to mitigate these risks and would provide financial and technical assistance to support rural residents on wells and septic systems.

Specifically, HB 2168 would:

- Provide \$5 million in funding to the Well Abandonment, Repair, and Replacement Fund at OWRD.
- Provide \$5 million in funding to the Onsite Septic Financial Aid Program at DEQ.
- Develop a new statewide technical assistance program within OSU extension to provide regional education, outreach, and assistance to care for and upgrade these systems, including navigation of available resources (see the [OSU Well Water Program](#)).

**Building on Proven Success**

HB2168 builds on the foundations established by previous legislation, such as HB2145 (2021) and HB 4128 (2024). These programs have already demonstrated the value of providing financial assistance for well abandonment, repair, and replacement. By increasing funding and extending these programs, HB2168 will ensure more Oregonians can protect their water resources and address urgent infrastructure needs.



4145 NE Cully Blvd., Portland, OR, 97630 | 503-290-8570

### **Community and Environmental Benefits**

By safeguarding groundwater, this bill helps protect public health, supports rural economies, and preserves Oregon’s natural resources. It will also support local contractors in the septic and well-drilling and repair fields.

HB 2168 aligns with state priorities for ensuring the safety of Oregon’s drinking water and goes beyond infrastructure—contributing to equity, resilience, and health in Oregon communities. By funding critical water and wastewater programs, it empowers communities by providing much needed resources, protects public health by ensuring clean and affordable water for all Oregonians, and builds resilience by preparing water systems to withstand future climate impacts.

The [Water Justice Policy Action Framework \(WJPAF\)](#) by Oregon Water Futures outlines several local and state opportunities for action that HB2168 addresses including, “funding programs to test, repair, and replace household-level infrastructures including wells and septic systems,” and emergency preparedness. The degree and intensity of an emergency is influenced by how well that community is resourced, the location, and emergency event. HB2168 provides critical resources to communities that can mitigate climate emergencies such as droughts.

### **Conclusion**

Verde urges the committee to support HB2168 to ensure that all Oregonians—especially those in low-income and rural communities—can maintain access to safe drinking water and modern wastewater systems. This legislation is a proactive, necessary step toward protecting Oregon’s water resources for current and future generations.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Roselyn Poton  
Water Justice Coordinator, Verde