

SB 545: Follow-up to Public Hearing on Jan.29th – Josie Koehne

Chair Meek, Vice-chair McLane and Members of the Finance & Revenue Committee,

As you heard today, many volunteer firefighters will not be eligible to meet the criteria spelled out in SB 545 in order to take advantage of the \$1000 tax credit, because they do not earn enough to have a tax liability. These are the very volunteers who need money the most, as they are at the lower end of the economic spectrum.

What I did not have time to mention in my oral testimony, is the direct appropriation will pay the recruit minimum wage for their area (around \$14.75 per hour) for their many hours spent in required training in an fire academy or elsewhere, in addition to the \$5000 PPE. This will be a huge incentive for them to complete their training time. This is reasonable compensation for all their time away from their families and on-call at all hours. Why should those risking their lives for us and fighting fires unpaid, also be asked to pay for their own training and firefighting equipment? This makes no sense.

These wildfires are NOT local anymore and we need many more firefighters than we have today;. We are in fact *losing* volunteers as mentioned. If we value their sacrifices, we need to offer something of immediate concrete benefit to them. Money toward their training and equipment should not come out of their own pocket or the tiny budgets of rural fire departments who have large service areas to cover. With the large conflagrations of today, these volunteers will be needed to serve and risk their lives in all areas of the state, and even in other states. Surely this small amount of \$10,000 per recruit for required fire readiness is worth a direct appropriation to a fund for this purpose, and will certainly attract more volunteers than \$1000 tax credit that only some can qualify for. All Oregonians benefit from fire protection.

Money spent on preventing fires from spreading is wisely spent. A token \$1000 'thank you' present a half year after the fire season ends is not.

I think most Oregonians will agree that this training is an extremely valuable investment for wildfire mitigation, and will be happy to pay for it with their tax dollars.

Please, at least discuss this proposal in Committee.

Thanks for listening,

Josie Koehne

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