

January 30, 2025

House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Tran and members of the Committee,

My name is Cathy Keathley, and I am a Gresham City Councilor. I speak to you today not only as a City Councilor, but also as a wife to Todd, a firefighter who served our community for over 30 years, and the mother of Lyle, a firefighter who serves our community today.

The City of Gresham is in strong support of HCR 2, which declares a commitment to the health and safety of firefighters and to finding an urgent solution to the problem of firefighting personal protective gear that contains cancer-causing chemicals.

Our firefighters consistently put their lives on the line to protect our community and save lives. Unfortunately, the gear they use in the line of duty often contains perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, which are a known carcinogen. We must push the industry to develop personal protective gear that is free of PFAS and all known carcinogens, and the legislature should ban the future use of PFAS in personal protective gear. That's what this resolution does, and our firefighters deserve nothing less.

I often think of what my husband was exposed to while on duty, and what harm is being inflicted on my son today. In fact, in his 30 years of service, my husband has gone to countless funerals of firefighters, many of whom succumbed to cancer. We never dreamed the gear they were wearing for protection from fire was actually contributing to cancer they died from. They are firefighters because they care about our community, want to protect and save people, and are willing to put their lives on the line day in and day out to do so.

What we need to do is similarly protect them.

We know now that PFAS materials are cancer-causing. We need to move away from this gear as quickly as possible, to protect those who so valiantly protect us. Moving away from PFAS-containing gear will not be easy, as fire departments throughout the state have invested heavily in what was state-of-the-art equipment, which is why it will be crucial for the state to help local fire departments transition to PFAS-free equipment as soon as possible.

As we learn more about the dangers and long-term impacts of any job-related health issues, it will be paramount to continue to push forward with work-related protections. This is an important and good first step. I would also like to note that I am certain NFPA (the National Fire Protection Association), NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) and USFA (United State

Fire Administration) are all looking into this issue. The work they will do is critical to ultimately finding a solution.

I am familiar with the work of these agencies and the impact they make because my husband was on an NFPA committee researching new design the SCBAs (self-contained breathing apparatus). The equipment used in the past was not functional and put firefighter lives in danger. The City of Gresham just had an incident that included flashover with two firefighters inside. The work the committee had done a decade ago on the redesign of the SCBA is the only reason why one of the firefighters was alive to receive a medal of valor at their awards ceremony last night. He still had burns over 45% of his body and lost all but two fingers. But he is alive for his wife and two young sons. That is why this work must be a priority until a workable solution is found.

This resolution is important because when the committee and agencies who are working on a solution know there is at least one state that has already committed their support to implement their work, they will be able to keep their research a priority,

A city councilor in Gresham that is deeply committed to this both personally and professionally, I would love to be a part of this solution for firefighter safety, regionally as well as in our community.

This resolution is in line with that goal—the protect firefighters—and our council stands in full support.

Thank you.



Councilor Cathy Keathley