



January 31, 2025
Testimony in Support of HB 3150

On behalf of the Lebanon Fire District (LFD), I strongly urge the passage of HB 3150, which would provide a \$1,000 tax credit to Oregon's volunteer firefighters. This proposal is a critical step toward addressing the growing challenges of volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention.

LFD has been a cornerstone of public safety in Linn County since 1884, operating as a dynamic all-hazards organization that seamlessly integrates career firefighters and dedicated volunteers. With 43 skilled career personnel and 55 committed volunteers, we protect 30,000 residents across a 134-square-mile fire protection zone and provide EMS to 40,000 people in Lebanon and surrounding communities.

Like many departments across Oregon, LFD is facing increasing difficulty in recruiting and retaining volunteers. Nationally, the number of volunteer firefighters has declined to historic lows, even as emergency call volumes have tripled over the past 35 years. Volunteers are expected to meet rigorous training requirements while balancing full-time jobs and family commitments. At LFD, we've found that for every 10 volunteers we train, only two become extremely active in responses. It takes seven volunteers to equal the availability of one career firefighter—highlighting just how vital recruitment and retention efforts are to maintaining public safety.

Training and equipping a single volunteer firefighter is a significant investment. Outfitting a volunteer with essential protective gear—helmet, coat, pants, boots, hood, gloves, SCBA, radio, and a thermal imager—comes at a substantial cost. Additionally, the extensive training required to make sure operational readiness demands time and financial resources. Providing a modest \$1,000 tax credit is a tangible way to recognize the dedication of these individuals and alleviate some of the financial burdens they face.

Volunteer firefighters are the backbone of fire protection in Oregon. Of the nearly 30,000 fire departments nationwide, more than 80% rely on volunteers to some degree. Without meaningful incentives, communities will continue to struggle with declining volunteer numbers, putting residents at greater risk.

HB 3150 represents a long-overdue investment in the men and women who selflessly serve their communities. I urge lawmakers to pass this legislation and send a clear message that Oregon values and supports its volunteer firefighters.

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