

Date: February 3, 2025

To: House Committee on Energy and Environment

Subject: Support for Resilience Hubs and Networks

Dear Chair Lively, Vice–Chair Gamba, Vice–Chair Bobby Levy, and Members of the House Committee On Climate, Energy, and Environment:

My name is Kristin Anderson Ostrom, and I am the Executive Director of Oregon Rural Action, based in La Grande. Our organization works with communities throughout eastern Oregon to promote social and environmental justice, agricultural and economic sustainability, and stewardship of the region's land, air, and water.

I am writing in support of HB 3170 to continue essential funding and support to rural communities. Last year, we worked with rural community centers in eastern Oregon to develop a model rural resilience hub in partnership with emergency services and the regional food bank. Unfortunately, the Resilience Hub grant had funding for only 96 of the 700 applications. We urge additional funding to support rural communities.

These community centers are existing hubs of the communities of Union (pop. 2,000), Cove (pop. 800), and Elgin (pop. 1,700.) These community centers provide everything from a place to learn to swim to a place to host a memorial or a wedding. They are important community infrastructure in an emergency or disaster because they are existing resources that are already utilized, trusted, and known by the local community, and often the only public space in town apart from the local school.

We support HB 3170 and the continued funding of Resilience Hubs and Networks because we know the smallest, most rural, and remote communities are often the least resourced and most vulnerable. Our fire departments are volunteer, the hospital, social service agencies, and even stores are in “town,” about 30 minutes away, so the ability to respond to emergencies and disasters within our rural towns is critical.

We also support HB 3170 because our communities are on the edge of forest and rangeland and on the front lines of wildfire. The hottest six summers on record in Union County have occurred in the last 10 years. Last summer was the hottest on record in neighboring rural Baker County. In

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our high desert climate, we are experiencing more extreme weather and more smoke. Both Elgin and Cove have experienced wildfires within sight of town.

Like most rural communities, we also have limited resources—both public and individual—and we want to make sure that every member of our community has access to needed resources and support in emergencies and disasters.

Finally, we also support HB 3170 because we support the model of funding local resilience hubs and networks, adding rural capacity in partnership with formal county and state emergency agencies. Local communities are the experts on their own neighbors and can respond as needed. In a disaster, the relationships, knowledge, and trust local people have with each other will be critical for effective disaster response.

The need and the opportunity to continue Resilience Hubs and Networks funding is clear. In the last cycle over 700 applications were submitted but only 96 were funded. These grants helped communities repair buildings that are emergency shelters, purchase satellite phones, generators, solar generators, water purification systems, and emergency vehicles; and financed staff positions like nurses and outreach staff. These investments will save lives, help first responders, speed recovery, and benefit the communities that are hit first and worst by extreme weather, wildfires, and other natural disasters.

We urge the legislature to support HB 3170. We need full and continued funding for this program so that more communities are prepared and organized to respond to disasters and emergencies.

Sincerely,

Kristin Anderson Ostrom

Executive Director

Oregon Rural Action

La Grande, Oregon

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