

February 19, 2025

House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: Strong Support for House Bill 3219 – Sustained State Funding for the Oregon Hazards Lab

Dear Chair Hudson, Vice-Chairs Harbick and Fragala, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 3219, which seeks to establish sustained state funding for the Oregon Hazards Lab (OHAZ) at the University of Oregon. I have dedicated over 20 years to public safety in Oregon, serving in multiple capacities, including as an elected member of the Board of Directors for Chiloquin Fire & Rescue. Our community has endured significant devastation from wildfires in recent years, with substantial areas of our district scarred and many homes lost.

Early detection and situational awareness are critical in mitigating the impacts of wildfires. OHAZ provides fire crews with real-time data that shows them the fire's location and initial behavior. This data helps incident commanders make more informed initial decision that help them plan resource needs thus ensuring the appropriate apparatus and personnel respond effectively. Moreover, local law enforcement and emergency management personnel rely on this information to develop timely evacuation plans, which can be the difference between life and death.

While my perspective is rooted in public safety, my support for OHAZ extends beyond that lens. As a former County Emergency Management Director, a Director of a local Fire District, and a Director of our 911 Emergency Communications District, I have witnessed firsthand the critical role OHAZ plays in disaster preparedness. Additionally, my commitment to this issue is deeply personal—on September 1, 2024, my family lost our home in the Copperfield Fire east of Chiloquin. This loss was devastating not only for us but also for our fire district, where firefighters take such tragedies to heart, especially when it affects one of their own. This experience has only strengthened my resolve to advocate for every possible resource that can help save lives, property, and our environment.

OHAZ is a vital asset for Oregon and our neighboring states. Through its seismic, wildfire, and remote sensing networks, it delivers real-time, life-saving data that aids in mitigating the

impacts of earthquakes, wildfires, landslides, and other disasters. Specifically, the ShakeAlert Earthquake Early Warning System provides precious seconds of advance notice before severe shaking begins, allowing Oregonians to take protective action. OHAZ's wildfire detection and situational awareness systems are indispensable in an era of escalating fire risk, helping emergency responders act quickly to minimize damage and destruction. These are not theoretical programs—they are active, operational systems that save lives and protect communities.

Investing in OHAZ is not just a public safety measure; it is a fiscally responsible decision. Hazard monitoring and early warning systems reduce disaster response costs, prevent infrastructure damage, and minimize economic disruption—ultimately saving the state millions of dollars. However, without sustained state funding, these critical programs face an uncertain future, leaving Oregon's communities increasingly vulnerable at a time when proactive resilience planning is more essential than ever.

I urge you to pass House Bill 3219 to ensure the continued operation and expansion of OHAZ. Doing so will reinforce Oregon's leadership in disaster resilience and provide lasting protection for our residents, infrastructure, and economy.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your leadership in advancing policies that safeguard our communities, and I stand ready to support you in this effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'BF' followed by a stylized flourish.

Brandon Fowler
PO BOX 338
Klamath Falls, OR 97601
brandonfowler@pm.me
(m) 541.539.1600