

Statement from Brian Melvin, Retired Deputy Sheriff, Douglas County Sheriff's Office.

Members of the committee, I would like to express my gratitude for allowing me to be a part of these public comments. I wish I could be here in person but last week's unforeseen weather event and obligations I have for today, it is unfortunate that I couldn't testify in person.

I can't express how much this topic means to me and countless others who have nothing but the public's best interest with whom we serve. I have been involved in service to others for almost 30 years. Whether it be my time as a United States Marine or a Deputy Sheriff with the Douglas County Sheriff's Office, I have always put the public's interest before my own.

While as a Deputy Sheriff, I became involved with Search and Rescue. I started out as a search mission manager and later became the Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue Coordinator. I have been to a number of different Search and Rescue management classes and I am a Search and Rescue management instructor for the Oregon State Sheriff's Association and also a Search Management instructor certified by Emergency Response International.

I have worked on hundreds of Search and Rescue missions not only in Douglas County but in other counties throughout Oregon and California. I have managed Search and Rescue missions in all types of environments and all types of scenarios.

One thing you all know is Oregon Statute states the Sheriff SHALL be responsible for Search and Rescue missions within their counties with a few exceptions to some Federal and Tribal land. With that, every Sheriff of our 36 counties have some form of a Search and Rescue

program. These programs are a mixture of a few paid personnel and a large majority of unpaid professionals.

These unpaid professionals have no driving factors other than to help find or rescue another human being. They work for their local Sheriff and respond to the requests of said Sheriff, often times traveling throughout the state and at times to other states to assist those outside jurisdictions. These unpaid professionals go through extensive training to become certified and do continuing educating and training to keep their skills and abilities up to date.

This brings me to why we are here and why I support this bill. It is well known to those who operate in the Search and Rescue profession that there are private, non-affiliated groups who claim to be Search and Rescue. While some of these groups have good intentions, there are some who are out to profit at the emotional and desperate expense of others.

For example:

In 2013, I was conducting a search for an overdue / missing boy out of AZ. His car was found on a rural road parked in front of an old rock quarry. A day after the search began, the father of the boy arrived and we spoke. The father who was desperate, on wanting to find his son, didn't think I had the resources to search properly.

I assume he felt this way because he didn't see a lot of searchers walking in open fields wearing bright clothing calling out his name. What he couldn't see were the number of searchers walking in the deep wooded area that surrounded where his son's car was found.

I tried to assure the gentleman that we were in fact doing all that could be done at that time but the father who felt helpless wanted more. The father contacted media outlets and began to sensationalize a

theory he had about his son. News outlets with abilities to go national with the story began to arrive in town of Canyonville. Word reached a private Search and Rescue group out of Texas who contacted the father. They were geared up and on their way to Oregon.

Concerned on what was transpiring, I contacted this group. I asked them how they planned on funding their operation. I was told they solicit donations and send a bill for their services to either the agency they were helping or to the requesting family members. I told the organization that the Douglas County Sheriff's Office was not seeking their help and I advised them to stay in Texas.

As a professional I have problems with this. Here is a group, who is coming from a long ways away, soliciting donations, with the intent on billing a victim's family or the agency they believe they are going to help. This group doesn't have any knowledge of the search area, what the circumstances are, or if they even possess the ability to complete the tasks needed. From a law enforcement standpoint and from personal experience, these Search and Rescue missions can quickly turn into a criminal matter. Here is a group that is not vetted and could quickly destroy a potential crime scene.

Later that evening, my Search and Rescue team located the body of the boy we were looking for. Because my Search and Rescue volunteers are professionals they knew exactly what to do, we were able to get deputies to the body and an investigation was done. It was determined the boy unfortunately took his own life.

Had I not intervened, this desperate father would have received a bill from this outside private Search and Rescue group. This unknown Search and Rescue group from TX would have solicited unknown amounts of money just by inserting themselves into the situation.

I have nothing against most nonprofit Search and Rescue groups. I have worked alongside great people within these groups. Here is why this bill is needed. These groups need their members to be vetted and cleared by a Sheriff's Office. These groups need to be aligned with a Sheriff's Office and adhere to rules and standards set forth by the Oregon State Sheriff's Association. These groups need to be under the operational authority of a Sheriff's Office so everyone knows the members of these groups are above board.

I have nothing to gain other than protecting desperate families from being taken advantage of and the keeping Search and Rescue under the watchful, control of the Sheriff for each county. No person or person's family should be billed for Search and Rescue.

Thank you for your time and allowing me to express my feeling on this important matter.

Brian Melvin / Retired Deputy, Douglas County Sheriff's Office