



February 28, 2025

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

RE: Support for HB 3634 – Operator-in-Training and Water Workforce Program

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

On behalf of the League of Oregon Cities (LOC), representing all 241 cities in Oregon, we express our strong support for House Bill 3634, which establishes the Water Workforce Program (Operator-in-Training) to address the critical need for drinking water and wastewater operators.

This is a top priority for our membership and we are grateful for the committee's time.

Reliable water infrastructure is essential for public health and community well-being, yet cities face a growing crisis as a significant portion of the workforce nears retirement. Without trained replacements, Oregon risks disruptions to safe drinking water and wastewater services. HB 3634 is a proactive solution to recruit, train, and retain skilled professionals in this vital field.

We also appreciate the leadership of the Legislature's Water Caucus in championing investments in workforce development, and this committee's willingness to hold a public hearing addressing this critical issue.

We urge your support for HB 3634 and stand ready to collaborate on its implementation.

Many thanks,  
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## Support Training Programs to Expand the Water Workforce

*Cities are asking for legislation that would expand the availability of qualified drinking water and wastewater operators.*

### Water Workforce Pipeline Slows to a Trickle

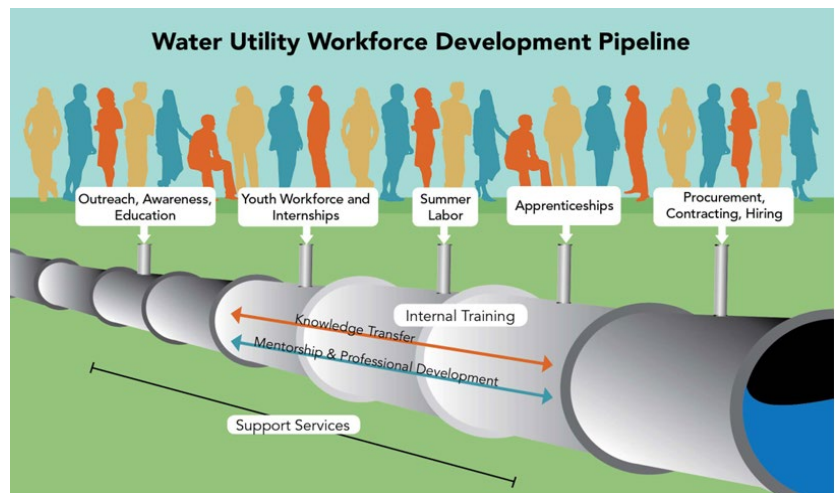
Water and wastewater utilities are the backbone of our healthy and prosperous communities. Water utilities ensure households have access to safe and clean water, and support economic development through stable and cost-effective services. These utilities have often been so successful that their success is taken for granted and we rarely see or hear about their challenges. A growing concern has emerged about the long-term sustainability of the workforce that make utilities function.

A large portion of the workforce is nearing retirement just as advances in technology and accelerating climatic change are bringing up new and more sophisticated challenges. A nimble and adaptive workforce provides the human capital to respond to new and emerging challenges and help the organization adapt to a changing environment.

### Operator-In-Training Apprenticeships

Cities need opportunities to recruit and retain qualified drinking water and wastewater operators. Funding apprenticeship training programs and expanding bilingual training opportunities to promote the workforce development of qualified wastewater and drinking water operators will aid in these efforts.

- Internship programs: One aspect of talent development is the use of interns. A barrier to quality interns can be the lack of pay that is associated with the opportunity.
- Funding operator-in-training apprenticeships will help cities meet the challenges of recruiting and retaining a qualified water workforce.
- Additional opportunities to recruit and retain qualified drinking water and wastewater operators are through state-to-state reciprocity. By allowing qualified operators from other states to enter the water workforce in Oregon, we can ensure our communities have the skilled workforce to provide access to safe and clean water.



Source: Willamette Partnership 2019 Water Infrastructure Workforce Report

The LOC will advocate for funding apprenticeship training programs and expanding bilingual training opportunities to promote the workforce development of qualified wastewater and drinking water operators.

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