



February 28, 2025

Subject: Support for HB 3634 and HB 3700
House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

Dear Chair Hudson and Vice-Chair's Fragala & Harbick,

I am writing to express my strong support for the HB 3634 and HB 3700 aimed at expanding the availability and training of qualified drinking water and wastewater operators. As you are aware, water and wastewater utilities are vital to the health, safety, and economic prosperity of our communities. They ensure that households have access to clean and safe water, underpinning our everyday life and economic activities.

Despite their critical role, these utilities face significant challenges, particularly concerning workforce sustainability, especially for small cities. With a substantial portion of the workforce approaching retirement age, and the increasing complexity of challenges due to technological advancements and climate change, there is an urgent need to ensure a continuous and skilled pipeline of operators.

The proposed legislation, which supports funding for operator-in-training apprenticeships and the expansion of bilingual training opportunities, is a step in the right direction. It not only addresses the immediate need for skilled personnel but also fosters a diverse and adaptable workforce capable of meeting future challenges. Additionally, internship programs, which are crucial for talent development, often lack the necessary funding to provide pay. Addressing this issue will enhance the attractiveness and efficacy of these programs.

Furthermore, I strongly support the state-to-state reciprocity for water workforce qualifications, as this will significantly bolster potential workforce by allowing qualified operators from other states to contribute to Oregon's water management needs. This will not only help in mitigating the immediate workforce shortages but also enhance the exchange of best practices and innovative solutions across state lines.

I urge you to pass these bills, as they are crucial for the continued success and reliability of our water utilities. Investing in our water workforce is an investment in the very foundation of our public health and community well-being.

Thank you for considering this critical important bills.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David A. Ford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Ford
Mayor