

Submitter: Jane Brown
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and
Wildfire
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB579

Honorable members of the Oregon Legislature,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 579, and the appropriation of moneys to allow the construction and renovation projects at the Umpqua Rural Fire Station which falls under Central Douglas Fire and Rescue (CDFR). This station has been unstaffed for many years due to budgetary issues. This project would significantly enhance CDFR's ability to respond to emergencies, support fire science and paramedic students, and improve services in a rural area that is currently underserved.

Our community has a large number of seniors and the need for responsive and timely emergency services has increased over the years. In addition, this area sees many recreational enthusiasts using the logging and forest roads, so the emergency responses have magnified. Currently, emergency responses have to come from CDFR's Melrose or Garden Valley stations or from the city of Sutherlin, all of which are at least 30 to 40 minutes away. The Umpqua Fire Station, when manned, will provide emergency services on average of 15 to 20 minutes more quickly. In addition, response to brush/forest fires in rural areas would be greatly increased. There may even be some reduction in fire insurance rates for local residents.

Umpqua was the site of a major conflagration fire in 2023 that was designated as the highest priority fire in the nation for nearly a week. The lessons learned during that time emphasized the urgent need for improved infrastructure in the area. The existing station is currently equipped with apparatus bays and has access to essential utilities, including water, electricity, and propane. However, the addition of living quarters—comprising bedrooms, a kitchen, bathrooms, a laundry facility, a day room, and supply storage—will allow the Fire Authority to staff the station with volunteer and student personnel, dramatically improving firefighting and emergency service to the area.

There are also many educational and training opportunities which would be enhanced. Umpqua Community College Fire Science and Paramedic students can be provided with housing while they complete their education, giving them real-life experience in an active fire station environment. Furthermore, it would allow the Douglas Forest Protective Association to stage their wildland crews at the station during fire season, improving coordination and response times in this rural mountainous area.

This project is designed with careful attention to durability, usability, sustainability, efficiency, and economy. It is not intended to be a lavish facility, but rather a practical and comfortable station that will enable CDFR to better serve our community. While the construction of a fire station is never a small undertaking, this is a project that the Fire Authority simply cannot manage without assistance. Central Douglas Fire & Rescue operates on a very tight budget, with little room for discretionary spending outside of our essential day-to-day operations.

This project will have a lasting impact on the hard-working farmers, ranchers, migrant workers, and visitors who live, work and recreate in this rural area. The Fire Authority strives to be a responsible steward of the limited resources they receive and is committed to providing the highest level of service to our community. Completing this project will significantly enhance their ability to serve this underserved area for years to come while providing critical housing and training opportunities for students in the Umpqua Community College Fire Science and Paramedic Programs.

I strongly recommend your support of this endeavor.

Respectfully,

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