

Honorable Members of the Oregon Legislature,

As Board President of Douglas County Fire District #2, and board member of Central Douglas Fire and Rescue, I write today to express my strong support for SB579, which would provide critical funding to add living quarters to Central Douglas Fire & Rescue's currently unstaffed fire station in Umpqua, Oregon. This project is essential to strengthening emergency response capabilities, supporting fire science and paramedic students, and improving services in a rural area that remains critically underserved.

The urgency of this project was underscored in 2023 when the Umpqua Fire Station was at the center of a major conflagration, designated the nation's highest-priority fire for nearly a week. Despite its strategic location, the station remains unstaffed, limiting response capabilities in a region prone to wildfires and other emergencies. While the facility has apparatus bays and access to utilities, it lacks essential living quarters, preventing the station from being consistently staffed.

By adding dormitories, a kitchen, bathrooms, a laundry facility, a day room, and supply storage, this project would enable the Fire Authority to house resident volunteers and fire science students, dramatically improving emergency response times. Additionally, it would provide several key benefits to the department and the surrounding community, including:

- **Faster Emergency Response:** Having firefighters and EMS personnel on-site reduces response times, ensuring critical care arrives sooner in medical emergencies, structure fires, and rescues.
- **Improved Recruitment & Retention:** Fire departments across the country struggle to attract and retain volunteers. Providing housing makes it easier to recruit students, trainees, and volunteers who might otherwise be unable to commit due to housing or travel constraints.
- **Increased Training & Readiness:** Living quarters allow for continuous training, ensuring personnel are always prepared for emergencies while also fostering teamwork and skill development.
- **Enhanced Community Safety & Prevention Efforts:** On-site personnel can conduct regular fire inspections, community education programs, and pre-fire planning, reducing overall risk in the area.
- **Stronger Support for Wildland Firefighting Efforts:** The station could serve as a key staging area for wildland firefighting crews during peak fire season, providing shelter, logistical support, and quicker deployment of resources.

- **Greater Stability During Disasters:** In the event of a major wildfire, flood, or earthquake, the station would serve as a hub for disaster response, coordination, and shelter for first responders.
- **Economic and Community Development:** Having a staffed station can improve insurance ratings for homeowners, potentially lowering premiums, while also contributing to the local economy by supporting students and volunteers living and working in the area.

This proposal is not about building an extravagant facility—it is a practical, cost-effective solution designed with durability, efficiency, and community benefit in mind. The Fire Authority operates with a lean budget, prioritizing essential services, and simply cannot undertake this critical infrastructure upgrade without assistance.

The impact of this project extends beyond fire response. Faster emergency services mean greater safety for the farmers, ranchers, workers, and families who live in the Umpqua area. Additionally, improved response times could lower insurance rates for residents, while enhanced staffing ensures immediate access to lifesaving equipment without the delays of relying on off-duty personnel traveling from neighboring stations.

SB579 is an investment in public safety, education, and the long-term resilience of our rural communities. I urge your support in making this vital project a reality.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Camron Pope  
Board Member, Central Douglas Fire and Rescue  
Board President, Douglas County Fire District #2