



Testimony by City of Wilsonville Mayor Shawn O'Neil Supporting HB 3634:

Lack of Trained Water and Wastewater Operators and Pending Retirements Demonstrates High Need for State Program to Improve Workforce

Scheduled for public hearing on March 4, 2025, before the
House Committee On Higher Education and Workforce Development

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

I am testifying on behalf of the City of Wilsonville in strong support of HB 3634, which establishes the Water Workforce Program in the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to operate workforce development initiatives for the water and wastewater utilities sector and requires HECC to provide grants to local workforce development boards and those boards to administer the program..

Wilsonville's Public Works Department has encountered challenges in recruiting, training, and retaining certified water- and wastewater operations employees. In addition, projected statewide retirements of qualified staff over the next decade will exacerbate the problem for all operators of water and wastewater systems.

In 2023, the Legislature approved one-time funding for the development of a training facility for certified operators and technical assistance staff in partnership with the Oregon Association of Water Utilities. Sustained funding for regional training facilities and direct funding for utilities hosting training programs is needed to train the next generation of water and wastewater operators.

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. The City of Wilsonville appreciates your consideration and urges your support of HB 3634.

Shawn O'Neil, Mayor
City of Wilsonville