



To: Senate Committee on Energy and Environment

Re: **Oppose SB 635**

5 March 2025

Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Brock and Senators Golden, Pham and Robinson,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. I'm a retired Physician Assistant and serve as Interim Executive Director of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility.

Oregon PSR was founded in 1981 by health professionals concerned about the threat of nuclear war. We've always worked to "Prevent what we cannot Cure." In 1985 we shared in the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to our international affiliate, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. Our mission has since expanded and includes work on climate and environmental justice. Through public health education and advocacy, we seek a healthy, just, and peaceful world for present and future generations. We are supported by over 2,400 members.

We strongly support the protections of our 1980 Ballot Measure.

We urge you to oppose SB 635, which would likely produce a very biased study on nuclear energy generation by Oregon State University (OSU).

OSU has a distinct conflict of interest. It has an investment stake in NuScale Corporation. OSU is a leading promoter of small modular nuclear reactors (SMNRs). Assigning this task to the public entity in Oregon with the most obvious conflict of interest would not instill confidence in the Oregon legislature.

Would this study include considerations of the source water to cool reactors?
Would this study determine where radioactive waste water will be dumped and/or how it will be stored and/or treated? Could this study identify which drinking water sources

would be contaminated and for how long? Could this study identify which salmon populations and other iconic NW species could be threatened by radioactive water and waste?

Does this committee consider that the Trump administration has removed the nuclear regulator and is rapidly dismantling safeguards meant to protect the public from nuclear waste, nuclear accidents and nuclear proliferation? What could possibly go wrong?

Please carefully consider the written testimony submitted to this committee on March 4 by Prof. MV Rahmana, School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. It reads, in part:

“...As I understand it, the purpose of the moratorium was to ensure that Oregon would not be saddled with new nuclear plants until there is a permanent disposal facility for radioactive spent fuel. Despite decades of effort and billions spent on trying to establish such a facility in the United States for the permanent disposal of radioactive waste, there is none in operation; nor is there any prospect of one for decades at the very least, if ever...”

The physical process underlying the operation of an SMR, i.e., nuclear fission, will always result in radioactive substances being produced. Thus, radioactive waste generation is inextricably linked to the production of nuclear energy, no matter what kind of reactor is used...”

The nuclear fuel cycle brings serious risks to public health and worker health at every stage. Exposure to the radioactive materials utilized by SMNRs will result in acute, chronic and cumulative health risks for thyroid disease, genetic defects, fertility problems, birth defects, leukemia, other cancers, and death while generating waste that remains hazardous for thousands to millions of years. The risks of catastrophic accidents, like Fukushima and Chernobyl, highlight the potential for irreversible harm to human health and the environment, and are compounded by increasing climate-related disasters.

SMNR sites will become temporary (and likely permanent) nuclear waste repositories, contaminating drinking water sources, indigenous cultural resources, agricultural lands, and harming the health of nearby residents and “downwinders.”

SMNRs will create long-term, extraordinary financial burdens for those tasked with the treatment and disposal of radioactive waste materials. **Who will pay for this?** Private commercial insurance will not pay. Taxpayers must

not end up footing the bill.

And, as we have seen in the Ukraine, **any nuclear facility can become a target in war**, for sabotage or terrorism. The potential for theft of nuclear material leading to the proliferation of nuclear weapons increases security risks exponentially.

Oregonians do not need or want an expensive study produced by a biased institution. We need protection from the well-documented health, safety and economic risks associated with nuclear facilities. We urge you to oppose SB 635.

You, our elected representatives, must prevent what we cannot cure.

Thank you,
Regna Merritt