



Public Works Service Area

City of Portland

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House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

Dear Chair Hudson, Co-Vice Chairs Fragala and Harbick, and members of the committee,

On behalf of the City of Portland's Public Works Service Area, the Bureau of Environmental Services (BES), Portland Water Bureau (PWB), and Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT), I am writing today to express our strong support for House Bill 3634, establishing the Water Workforce Program to grow the supply of skilled water professionals.

Portland's Public Works Service Area is facing a shortage of water professionals in the wastewater, stormwater, and drinking water sectors which includes teams in BES, PWB, and PBOT. As a local wastewater and stormwater management agency, BES is committed to improving water quality in Portland and across Oregon and managing our natural resources responsibly. PBOT's Operations and Maintenance team provides service to the city's wastewater and stormwater collection system while also maintaining safe streets. PWB provides excellent water to a quarter of Oregonians every minute of every day and works collaboratively with regional water providers to grow the water sector workforce. Our three bureaus, working together, can create opportunities for shared learning, pipelines for multiple certifications, and promotional opportunities to advance a new model for "One Water."

HB 3634 could fund opportunities to grow BES' new pilot Operator-In-Training program, which provides a two-year track for high school graduates to obtain a Wastewater Operator certification, or BES and PBOT's recent EPA grant proposal to develop a Public Works Academy to create new leadership development, occupational training, mentoring, and cross-training programs that ensure incumbent drinking water and wastewater utility workers are prepared for higher level supervisory or management-level positions. Additionally, PWB has worked with water utility partners in the region on proposed efforts to establish workforce development to create a pool of local, trained operators. HB 3634 would fill a long-identified need for drinking water and wastewater providers.

HB 3634 comes at a critical time when the federal government's limited but highly competitive water/wastewater workforce funding opportunities are in doubt. HB 3634's funding will make a substantial impact to develop multiple pathways to training, apprenticeships, certification, and educational opportunities that will benefit local high school graduates, workers facing unemployment, and people looking for living wage stable careers that provide critical services to Oregonians.

The City of Portland is very supportive of HB 3634 and the operational stability it creates for water and wastewater utilities. Please support HB 3634 and consider expanding this bill to include high school programs.

Thank you,

Priya Dhanapal
Deputy City Administrator
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