



February 13, 2025

Re: Support for Senate Bill 837 – the State Emergency Registry of Volunteers in Oregon (SERV-OR)

Dear Chair Senator Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and Members of the Senate Committee on Health Care:

My name is Alex Drungil, and I serve as the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) Coordinator for Deschutes County. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 837, which proposes amendments to the State Emergency Registry of Volunteers in Oregon (SERV-OR). These changes will significantly enhance Oregon's ability to effectively deploy and utilize volunteers in public health and emergency response efforts.

Expanding Eligibility for Non-Licensed Support and Administrative Volunteers

The Deschutes County MRC is largely composed of non-licensed volunteers who play a crucial role in emergency and disaster response efforts. These individuals bring diverse skills that are essential to the overall effectiveness of our response capabilities, including logistical coordination, administrative support, and non-clinical patient care.

However, current legislation limits their ability to fully engage in these efforts. By expanding eligibility to include non-licensed support and administrative healthcare volunteers, Senate Bill 837 would ensure that these highly capable individuals can contribute meaningfully, helping to reduce gaps in Oregon's emergency response system. A well-rounded response team is critical to effectively managing public health emergencies, and this bill allows us to better utilize all willing and skilled volunteers.

Allowing Year-Round Volunteer Service Without an Emergency Declaration

Currently, Deschutes County has the only Medical Reserve Corp unit within region 7. Expanding liability coverage for SERV-OR volunteers would greatly help the deployment and protection of the DCMRC to neighboring counties without adequate resources.

Senate Bill 837 would align the SERV-OR with the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) volunteer program, providing liability coverage for volunteers in a broader range of response scenarios. This change would:

- Improve overall response capacity by allowing volunteers to assist in situations that require immediate action but fall outside the scope of a declared emergency.

- Reduce administrative burdens and operational delays associated with waiting for an official emergency declaration.
- Enhance collaboration and resource-sharing across counties, strengthening Oregon's overall disaster response framework.

Clarifying Out-of-State Deployment Under EMAC

Oregon law allows SERV-OR volunteers to deploy to other states through the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC), but a gap in the statute prevents this from working as intended.

For example, in 2018, Oregon could not send volunteers to Alaska after an earthquake because SERV-OR volunteers were not explicitly designated as "officers of the state," a requirement under EMAC. Senate Bill 837 fixes this issue, ensuring that Oregon can send SERV-OR volunteers to support emergencies in other states, while also providing them with the appropriate tort and workers' compensation coverage.

Authorizing Health Screenings for Volunteers

To ensure volunteers are assigned appropriately, Senate Bill 837 clarifies that the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) can conduct health screenings of volunteers before deployment. This will:

- Help volunteers be placed in roles that match their physical capabilities, mobility, and medical conditions.
- Ensure safe and effective deployment assignments.
- Improve the overall efficiency of Oregon's emergency response system.

Conclusion

The Deschutes County Medical Reserve Corps strongly supports Senate Bill 837. By expanding volunteer eligibility, allowing year-round service, clarifying out-of-state deployment, and authorizing health screenings. This bill modernizes Oregon's volunteer response framework and ensures a stronger, more efficient disaster and public health response.

Alex Drungil
Medical Reserve Corps Coordinator
Deschutes County Health Services