

Submitter:	Heather Gibons
On Behalf Of:	Chintimini Wildlife Center
Committee:	Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire
Measure, Appointment or Topic:	SB1131

Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash, and Members of the Committee, I strongly support SB 1131 as Development Coordinator at Chintimini Wildlife Center.

Let me take you back to September of 2020. In addition to enduring the COVID-19 Pandemic, Oregon experienced the worst wildfire season in recorded history, culminating in a huge wildfire event in early September, which included the Santiam Fire. Chintimini Wildlife Center remained open for wildlife patients in 2020, and on September 10th, a 1.5-pound bobcat kitten with burned paws was brought to us for help.

The bobcat was found alone inside a chicken coop, malnourished, and orphaned. It's likely that when the Santiam Fire peaked, a few days earlier, mom and kitten were separated in the chaos. Fortunately, Chintimini Wildlife Center was ready, as we are 365 days a year, to receive this tiny example of what the terror of wildfire can do to our wildlife.

That September, we saw numerous patients with smoke inhalation and burns, and, unfortunately, we expect to see many more when the next wildfire strikes. During those wildfires, Turtle Ridge Rehabilitation Center in Salem was still open and operating, however, they have since closed. Our service area has swelled enormously to include Salem and northwards to Portland, in addition to Corvallis and Eugene. As of 2024, 23% of our patients now come from Marion County, compared to just 1.5% in 2020.

To remain open for patients in the Willamette Valley, we must create a sustainable funding source, as Chintimini (and most rehabilitation centers) receives no federal funding for the thousands of animals admitted each year. The center solely survives on the generosity of our community, but our budget exists on a tightrope, unable to make necessary upgrades to our deteriorating facilities. We often have to consider cutting back our services to survive another year. The grant funding from this bill will allow us to elevate our outreach and education to a level we have been working towards for years, and create sustainable income by having a Nature Center open to the public.

Let me close with this—the tiny 1.5-pound bobcat? She was released after an extended six month stay, spending the winter in our Wildlife Hospital. She gained 20 pounds and learned to hunt independently, all while retaining her wild instincts. This

story of wildlife resilience and the resilience of Chintimini Wildlife Center is why we are now asking you to pass this bill so that this valuable community resource can continue to exist, providing services to humans and wildlife. Thank you.