

To the Ways and Means committee and those committee members,

My name is Lydia Moges, and I represent the Ethiopian and Eritrean Cultural and Resource Center, a community-based organization that is a recipient of the Water Equity Fund. We serve marginalized and low-income refugees and immigrants in the Portland Metro Area, with a mission to offer culturally relevant services and resources that promote self-sufficiency, integration, and success. Our work focuses on providing education, resources, and empowering tools, while advocating for social justice and equity. A vital part of our ability to serve and uplift marginalized Oregonians is the partnerships and support we rely on, such as the Water Equity Fund. We strongly support HB 3528 and are asking for the approval of the \$4 million ask, as it is an essential step toward addressing Oregon's water challenges for all its residents.

The Community Water Justice Awards program has been vital in raising awareness and building leadership around water justice issues in our community. Through workshops presented in participants' native languages (Amharic, Tigrinya, and Oromo) we've addressed topics like water disparities, water conservation, and concerns about water quality. Many in our community have expressed concerns about the impact of water hardness and fears with the inconsistencies in water quality, which have made them hesitant to drink certain sources of water. In pre-surveys, we also heard repetitive concerns about not knowing how to respond to water-related disasters, as many of our participants are new to Oregon and unfamiliar with the local systems.

Through creative and engaging activities, such as testing daily water use and participants comparing their estimated consumption to the actual amount, learning practical examples of water preservation techniques, opened their eyes to new best practices and helped address their concerns.

In the following workshop, we addressed these concerns by focusing on Emergency Preparedness. We explored various types of disasters, including those driven by climate

change, and worked together to identify the essentials of an emergency kit. For many participants, this information was new and crucial, as they lacked access to resources on how to prepare for disasters in their home countries. We also provided guidance on how to connect with emergency alerts, but we quickly realized that language barriers would limit their ability to fully benefit from these resources. This reinforced the importance of having community ambassadors, trusted individuals who can relay emergency alerts in participants' native languages.

One example that stands out, is a participant, who was a nurse in their home country who became a caregiver in Oregon, had never understood the significance of having basic disaster preparedness items, like water jugs, fire extinguishers, or first aid kits, in the homes where they provided care. However, after attending our workshops, presented in their native tongue, they gained a clear understanding of preparedness and responded by becoming a leader in their community, volunteering as a water disaster emergency preparedness ambassador.

We recruited two youth and two senior ambassadors from the workshops to help spread this knowledge, where they took part in emergency preparedness training sessions. The ambassadors shared that, community members who hadn't attended the workshops would better grasp the importance of preparedness, if they could see example kits. With limited resources, we assembled a small number of sample kits containing emergency water, flashlights, first aid supplies, emergency blankets, small toolkits, gloves, and bags. These kits have been a powerful tool in educating the broader community on how to respond to emergencies, leading many to sign up for alerts in languages they can understand.

The community has expressed a strong need for further commitment, connecting them with the resources they need to take ownership of their own preparedness and to ensure their voices are heard. We want to empower, by equipping our community with the

knowledge and tools to advocate for their rights and fight inequities that prevent them from receiving fair treatment.

However, there is still much work to be done. We've only scratched the surface in addressing the water justice needs of the people we serve. Our efforts to raise awareness and build leadership must continue, especially through culturally appropriate initiatives that reflect the diverse needs of our community.

That's why I strongly urge you to pass HB 3528 and the asked amount. By doing so, you will ensure that all Oregonians, particularly those most impacted, have access to clean and reliable water. This bill represents an investment in the health, safety, and resilience of our communities today and for generations to come.

Thank you for your consideration.

Lydia Moges

Water Equity Fund Recipient
Ethiopian & Eritrean Cultural & Resource Center
Serving Refugees & Immigrants in the Portland Metro Area.