

Submitter: Lisa Cohn
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SJR28

To the Senate Committee on Rules,

Oregon is such a special place, rich with forests, rivers, mountains and wildlife. All of these resources make it a wonderful place to live but our beautiful environment is threatened by climate change, pollution and the Trump administration.

We need to protect our right to healthy air, water and a stable climate.

SJR 28-1 makes our state and local governments responsible for protecting Oregonians from human-caused environmental harm EXPLICIT in our Constitution. Protecting our communities should be our government's highest priority. The measure, Right to A Healthy Environment, clears the way for our leaders to do what must be done to protect our lives and futures.

When the U.S. and Oregon constitutions were written, pollution meant nuisance issues like the smell of hog farms or water pollution from tanneries. Today, the health and safety of Oregonians are threatened by more than nuisance issues. We have toxic pollutants in the air, and water and soil plus threats from climate change-- drought, wildfires and heavy winter storms, to name a few. SJR 28-1 is about updating our constitution, and our rights, to protect us against the greatest threats we face today.

Oregon's current system waits to address environmental threats until public pressure forces the Legislature to act. Preventing environmental disasters is much less costly than cleaning up after disasters.

Passing the RTHE amendment will give agencies and their lawyers the power to proactively address threats to our health and safety. The current system limits them to waiting for a public outcry before addressing urgent environmental threats – a recipe for continuous disasters.

Oregon's current regulatory system depends heavily on federal environmental laws, including the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the Environmental Protection Agency's definitions of toxic levels to regulate our air, water, ecosystems, and climate systems. These bedrock environmental laws are in jeopardy with the new administration's general approach against effective environmental protection.

The Oregon movement for a Right to Healthy Environment is part of a national movement to add green amendments to state constitutions. Montana and Hawaii have successfully used their existing constitutional language to win lawsuits against their state governments in recent cases.

With the threats of climate change and threats to environmental laws, I'm worried about my kids' future, and the future of all Oregonians. It's time to protect that future and continue Oregon's environmental leadership.

Thank you,

Lisa Cohn