

Submitter: Barbara Kohnen
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SJR28
Testimony in Support of the Right to a Healthy Environment Constitutional Amendment

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

I urge you to support the proposed constitutional amendment establishing the Right to a Healthy Environment. This amendment is essential to protecting the health, safety, and future of all Oregonians.

Despite Oregon's history of environmental leadership, we are falling behind in addressing the escalating threats of climate change, air and water pollution, and ecological degradation. Diesel pollution alone contributes to hundreds of premature deaths annually in our state, while more than 120,000 miles of waterways are impaired. Wildfires, fueled by rising temperatures and drought, are destroying our forests and communities. These dangers are urgent, real, and growing.

This constitutional amendment would provide Oregonians with a fundamental right to clean air, safe drinking water, and thriving ecosystems. It would establish a strong, enforceable foundation for ensuring state agencies and lawmakers take the necessary steps to safeguard public health and natural resources. There is no fiscal impact to this measure.

Policies like the Climate Protection Program and existing emission standards, while important, are not enough. They are vulnerable to political changes and have failed to address the full scope of Oregon's environmental challenges. A constitutional amendment would create a durable, long-term commitment to environmental protection and set a higher standard for reducing pollution and protecting the people of Oregon.

Oregonians deserve a future where our health and environment are not sacrificed for short-term gains. I urge you to act boldly by supporting this ballot referral to enshrine the Right to a Healthy Environment in Oregon's Constitution.

Thank you.

Barbara Kohnen
Multnomah County Democrats
Climate Action Team