

OREGON PSR

PHYSICIANS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

March 25, 2025

To: Senate Committee on Rules

Subject: Support SJR 28-1

Dear Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Bonham, and Members of the Senate Committee on Rules,

My name is Andy Harris, MD. My testimony is in support of SJR 28-1 on behalf of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility, representing over 2,000 healthcare professionals and public health advocates.

Everyone deserves a fundamental right to a healthy environment with clean air, clean water and a stable climate. As a grandfather of 7 grandchildren, I care deeply about their health and the health of their grandchildren.

As a physician I have treated children and elderly patients with asthma and COPD, including VA patients who could only survive in an iron lung. We must reduce air pollutants, including nitrous oxides from diesel trucks and cars, and greenhouse gases that are heating the planet and causing severe storms and wildfires.

In the 50 years that I have lived in Oregon, the air and water quality have deteriorated significantly. National data indicate that Oregon's asthma mortality rate is twice as high as the national average (Ertle and London, Journal of Asthma, Vol 35, Issue 3). Nitrates from fertilizers and confined animal feed operations have polluted streams, rivers and aquifers, causing blue baby syndrome, birth defects, cancer and thyroid disorders.

Why do we need a constitutional amendment to assure a healthy environment? Existing environmental regulations contain loopholes that continue to allow pollution that is detrimental to our health. SJR 28-1 will reduce pollution and improve the health of Oregonians, while saving precious healthcare dollars.

The Oregon Constitution needs an update to reflect the threats posed by toxic pollutants in our air, water and soil and by climate change, conditions that were unknown when the constitution was written and ratified in 1857, two years before statehood.

Oregon currently depends heavily on federal environmental laws including the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the EPA's definitions of toxic levels of pollutants. These environmental laws could be in jeopardy as the new administration pushes back against effective environmental protections.



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Finally, there is no fiscal impact to referring SJR 28-1 to the electorate for the voters to decide whether this Right to a Healthy Environment should be added to Oregon's other Bill of Rights.

Sincerely,

Andy Harris, MD



Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility
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