

Submitter:

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On Behalf Of:

Committee:

Senate Committee On Rules

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

SJR28

Families for Climate is a grassroots, volunteer-powered organization working to mobilize parents, kids and families for climate justice and a livable future for all. Our membership consists of almost one thousand parents and caregivers across Oregon, and this testimony is in support of SJR 2801.

As parents, we try to instill in our children the understanding that it is far better to prevent harm than try to repair it, with such everyday, common-sense protections as sunscreen, bike helmets, etc. Unfortunately, under our current system, Oregon does not address environmental threats until and unless public pressure forces the Legislature to act. Like spilled milk, environmental toxins cannot be put back in the bottle; sadly, unlike milk, most environmental messes cannot be easily cleaned up—if at all. The Oregon constitution needs to be updated to protect our families against the many looming threats to the air we breathe, the water we drink, the soil in which our food grows, and the climate upon which we all depend.

As far back as ancient Rome, it has been understood that natural resources common to all people must be protected by the state; a principle we have come to call the public trust doctrine, and which any justice-minded child can tell you is only fair and right. However, in 2020 the Oregon Supreme Court ruled in *Chernaik v. Oregon* that only navigable waters fall under the public trust doctrine. This ruling shone a spotlight on a devastating gap in our laws: that the courts do not recognize the state's duty to protect critical natural resources such as land, air, and groundwater.

All Oregonians, regardless of political beliefs or party, deserve and depend on clean air, water and a stable climate. Amending Oregon's constitution to include the Right to a Healthy Environment—if approved by voters—will ensure that our precious natural resources are safeguarded for our children and future generations without protracted, expensive, and uncertain legal disputes.

We ask that the committee support SJR 28-1.

Thank you.