



March 26, 2025

To: Chair Senator Jama, Vice Chair Senator Bonham, and Members of the Senate Committee on Rules

Re: SJR 28 – Fundamental Right to Healthy Environment

OGA Supports Senate Joint Resolution 28, a legislative referral to the voters to amend the Oregon Constitution relating to a right to a clean, safe and healthy environment. OGA works to improve the lives of older adults and those who support them in Oregon and SW Washington. Our network enables service providers, policy makers, businesses, educators, researchers, students and others to share expertise and best practices to address challenging issues.

Climate change trends are on a collision course with our state’s demographic outlook. In 2022 there were an estimated **806,907** adults 65 or older living in Oregon. By 2050, there will be an estimated **1,280,678** older adults living in Oregon, a 59% increase and will account for nearly one in four Oregonians.

Even now, climate change disproportionately impacts older adults threatening their ability to live healthy and secure lives.¹

There are multiple reasons for this. Older adults may not be physically as resilient as younger people and in general, older adults have more chronic diseases for which fire, smoke, and flooding can negatively impact their ability to access life-saving medical care. Older adults are more susceptible to heart attack and other ailments due to extreme heat or cold. People outlive their ability to drive by seven to 10 years putting them at higher risk to escape a climate emergency.²

Other issues impacting older adults:³

- **Limited Mobility:** Many older adults experience reduced mobility due to arthritis, muscle weakness, or other physical limitations, making it harder for them to evacuate, seek shelter, or access essential services during an emergency.
- **Living Alone:** Many older adults live alone, which increases their vulnerability in a climate emergency.
- **Communication Barriers:** Older adults may not be as comfortable with modern technology (e.g., social media, smartphones, or emergency alert systems) that younger generations use to

¹ Arigonia, Danielle. 2023, Climate Resilience for an Aging Nation.

² ibid

³ Chat CPT

stay informed during disasters. This can prevent them from receiving critical warnings or instructions.

- **Reliance on Caregivers:** Older adults with physical or cognitive disabilities often rely on caregiving services for daily assistance. In a climate emergency, when these services may be disrupted or unavailable, older individuals may be left without support, making them more vulnerable to harm.
- **Overburdened Healthcare Systems:** A climate crisis may overwhelm healthcare systems, limiting the availability of medical assistance, medications, and resources for elderly individuals who require specialized care.

OGA recognizes the needs to support older adults in terms of climate crisis planning but we also urge lawmakers to understand that this is an intergenerational issue that impacts all Oregonians. We hope work now will improve the outlook for younger people and future generations to improve climate resilience, readiness and response.

Sincerely,

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Chair, OGA Advocacy/Policy Committee