

Submitter: Willow Kasner
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SJR28

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SJR 28-1 which is a proactive solution that will help our grandchildren inherit a healthy state.

As a 6th-generation rural Oregonian with deep roots in both logging and farming, I have witnessed firsthand the devastating effects of pollution. These impacts are personal to me, and they are growing. Over the years, holding polluting entities accountable has become increasingly difficult, and the need for action has never been more urgent.

SJR 28-1 represents a critical opportunity for Oregon to act. This amendment is not only about addressing pollution; it is about safeguarding our families' health and ensuring that every Oregonian has the right to clean air, water, and a healthy environment. Too many young people are leaving Oregon due to environmental threats that jeopardize their health and future, and this amendment will provide them hope for a healthier, safer Oregon.

This amendment is an overdue update to our state constitution. When the U.S. and Oregon constitutions were written, pollution was seen as a minor inconvenience. Today, we know that pollution is a direct threat to public health, causing diseases like cancer and respiratory illnesses. Climate change further intensifies risks, bringing more severe wildfires, droughts, and extreme weather.

Currently, state agencies often find themselves in a reactive stance, waiting for public outcry before they can act. This approach has left Oregon vulnerable to pollution, with issues like toxic nitrate levels in groundwater, wildfires, and regulatory delays impacting our communities. SJR 28-1 would change this by clarifying the state's duty to prevent environmental harm. It would provide the legal foundation for agencies to act swiftly and decisively, ensuring stronger environmental protections without relying on federal regulations.

I have watched as Oregon struggles to address its environmental crises. Over 120,000 miles of rivers and streams are impaired or polluted, and rural communities, like those in Morrow County and Rockaway Beach, lack safe drinking water. Despite climate warnings, Oregon has been slow to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, putting our future at risk. This amendment will equip the state with the tools to address these challenges proactively.

Opponents of this amendment may argue that existing regulations are enough.

However, those regulations often depend on federal laws that can change with political leadership. In the case of *Chernaik v. Oregon*, the courts did not recognize a constitutional duty to protect our environment. Without SJR 28-1, we risk waiting decades while our environment continues to degrade.

This is not about restricting property rights or imposing burdensome regulations. It is about recognizing that polluting in a way that harms others is unacceptable. Clean air and water are fundamental rights, and SJR 28-1 will enshrine these rights in our state constitution, ensuring that the protection of our environment is a non-negotiable priority and holding big polluters accountable.

The cost of inaction is far greater than the cost of prevention. Cleaning up pollution, rebuilding after climate disasters, and treating pollution-related health issues place an immense financial burden on taxpayers. By acting now, we can prevent these costs from spiraling out of control.

Importantly, referring SJR 28-1 to the ballot carries no fiscal impact. This decision belongs to the people of Oregon, to vote on whether their right to a healthy environment should be in the constitution- sending a clear message that protecting the environment is not a luxury—it is the foundation of a thriving, healthy Oregon- prioritizing the future of our children & grandchildren.

I urge you to support SJR 28-1 The people of Oregon deserve the constitutional right to a healthy, sustainable future- ensuring that future generations inherit a beautiful healthy & vibrant Oregon.

Thank you for your time,
Willow Kasner