

April 1, 2025

House Committee on Judiciary

Christine Grom, Gates, OR -- In Opposition to HB 3917

Chair Kropf and members of the Committee, my name is Christine Grom and I want to share with you my traumatic experience during the 2020 fire in Gates, Oregon.

My husband and I were watching TV. I heard the noise first, got up to go outside and when I opened the door there were big tree limbs coming down everywhere. We rushed out to try to get those limbs off the cars so they wouldn't catch fire and explode. All of a sudden, the tree across the street broke and hit our electric box which caused it to rip off the house leaving a live wire bouncing between the house and the shop. I called Pacific Power immediately, but it was just a fast busy tone. After 3 attempts, I called 911 and told them to please do something because the livewire was bouncing everywhere. It was terrifying.

I ran over to my parents' house on our property, and told them to grab what they could and leave. I have never seen my dad so panicked in my life. My husband helped him remove trees so they could get out. My father was shaking, begging me to hurry and get behind him and mom to leave. My husband and I rushed back to the house to grab stuff, but it was pitch black and we needed to get our 3 dogs out first.

My phone rang 25 minutes later. It was my mom telling me that dad had a major stroke during the evacuation. He was at the Stayton Hospital ER. So, we dropped everything, grabbed the dogs and left. It was panic on top of panic. I couldn't believe what was happening.

On the way out, Hwy 22 was engulfed in flames on both sides. I was crying hysterically, begging God to not take my family. I couldn't breathe because the smoke was so bad that it affected my asthma and COPD. And I was crying really hard.

My Mom told us we couldn't get in to see Dad because they were running tests, so we drove to Silverton. We slept 2 days in our truck at the park. Our friend Albert managed to get back to the neighborhood to videotape houses after the fires. I received a text from him saying I'm so sorry and a video of everything we own completely leveled. All I could do was scream No and cry for hours holding my fur babies so tight.

Meanwhile, I learned that my Dad was paralyzed and only had some movement in his right arm. I ended up losing my superhero and best friend on Jan 2nd 2022.

On that day, I literally lost everything. It is something I will live with for the rest of my life and it's not something you just get over. My husband defended our country for 30 years and all his hard work is gone. Our retirement home is gone, everything I got from my dad gone. Pacific Power took everything from us and still claims to not be at fault. We literally had a bouncing livewire on our property during the fire. They must be held accountable. Please don't make someone else feel the pain and suffering that we all felt that night and please don't let them escape their responsibility.

They should not get bailed out through our tax dollars or through rate payers bills increasing.

I urge you to vote **NO on HB 3917**