

April 1, 2025

House Committee on Judiciary

Testimony of Rachelle McMaster, Otis, OR -- No on HB 3917

Chair Kropf and members of the Committee, my name is Rachelle McMaster and I am one of the many who survived the 2020 Oregon wildfires. In September of 2020 the wildfire tore through the town of Otis destroying over 300 structures and displacing over 1000 people. Today, there are still over 100 families that have not found stable or permanent housing. I can still feel the fear of that day – having to evacuate and not knowing if I would make it out alive.

Nightmares are still a regular part of my life. I will wake up in a cold sweat having just dreamed of being surrounded by fire with no means of escape. I know I am not alone in these feelings. Every time PacifiCorp refuses to settle and has a new trial, I along with other fire survivors relive that horrible nightmare over and over.

It wasn't just items we lost in the wildfire, it was precious memories and traditions. Pictures and family heirlooms passed down through generations that no longer exist and can never be replaced.

PacifiCorp was told to shut off the power during the fire and they chose not to. How much could have been saved had they just done the right thing? Now they are looking for ways to evade their responsibility should this ever happen again.

A jury heard the facts of my case and offered some justice so my family could start rebuilding our lives. I have yet to receive anything almost five years later. Instead, I'm reliving the most terrifying and devastating time in my life to testify and plead for justice for the survivors of the 2020 fires and for the survivors of the future.

Nothing can replace my precious family heirlooms and photos, nor can it bring back my family's traditions. As a family, our favorite time of year has always been Christmas. As a family we would decorate our Christmas tree with glass beads from Grandma, elves that my mom had on her tree growing up, handmade ornaments from my kids. All of these things are now gone, and I know to a corporation like PacifiCorp, but it means absolutely nothing, but to my family it means everything.

There's no one-sized-fits-all price you can put on an individual's trauma or loss. That's what a jury is for. We ask that you hold the utility companies accountable for their actions if they don't act responsibly. Protect future victims of wildfires, but not on the backs of rate payers. Oregon families are depending on you to stand with us.

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