

April 8, 2025

To: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire

RE: Support for SB 1154 (Oregon's Groundwater Protection Law)

Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Nash and Members of the Committee:

My name is Joel Iboa and I am the executive director of Oregon Just Transition Alliance (OJTA). We are a member-based alliance of urban and rural communities across Oregon, representing thousands of people who experience environmental harms first and worst. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 1154 and its -1 amendment, to update and fix the broken Groundwater Quality Protection Act of 1989.

In 2020, OJTA organized a statewide Listening Tour that brought together Oregonians from across the state to gather insights that shape our policy efforts today. During the tour, many alliance members and their communities voiced concerns about their water quality and scarcity, where industrial agriculture and logging activities have depleted and damaged vital watersheds. Those living and working in agricultural communities shared fears that toxins and other chemicals are contaminating their drinking water.

Since then, nitrate pollution has only gotten worse.¹ Many residents only recently learned that their groundwater was unsafe, despite state agencies and polluters having known about the issue for decades. As a consequence, countless families have faced health problems linked to nitrate pollution, including cancer, miscarriages, thyroid issues, and birth defects.

More than 80% of Oregonians currently rely on groundwater for their drinking water, making the Groundwater Quality Protection Act of 1989 one of Oregon's most important environmental laws. Despite this, the law has not been updated in more than three decades and has failed to meaningfully deliver impact. OJTA supports SB 1154 because it:

- Gives agencies authority to enforce standards as opposed to relying on voluntary efforts to reduce pollution;

¹<https://www.oregonlive.com/environment/2025/01/nitrate-contamination-has-gotten-worse-in-eastern-oregon-over-the-past-decade.html>.

- Ensuring groundwater polluters are financially and legally responsible to repair damages they have done;
- Calls for better coordination amongst agencies and clearly identified roles; and
- Holds agencies accountable to uphold groundwater protections.

We would just recommend from an environmental justice principle, that those directly impacted by groundwater pollution are represented in the proposed task force or committees.

Everyone has the right to clean water, a healthy environment. We urge you to support this bill.

Thank you,

Joel Iboa
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