



MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

April 7, 2025

Chair Senator Jeff Golden
Vice-Chair Senator Todd Nash
Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire

RE: Opposition to SB 1154 -1 – Groundwater Quality Management Reform

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

The Marion County Board of Commissioners writes to express our strong opposition to Senate Bill 1154 -1, which proposes a sweeping and complex overhaul of Oregon's groundwater quality management framework. While we share the Legislature's goal of ensuring clean and safe drinking water, this bill undermines essential principles of local control, private property rights, and transparency.

A Sweeping Expansion of Unelected Bureaucratic Authority

SB 1154 -1 grants significant power to unelected interagency teams, under the direction of a Governor-appointed lead agency, to conduct investigations, inspections, and implement binding policies across large geographic areas. These authorities include:

- Modifying or revoking land use permits;
- Imposing restrictions on agricultural operations;
- Conducting private property inspections with minimal notice and no warrant;
- Restricting residential development and well installation in rural areas.

This top-down framework bypasses local governments and provides no meaningful process for appeal or exemption, even for communities and property owners who are not directly responsible for contamination.

Erosion of Local Decision-Making and Property Rights

The bill allows counties to prohibit new residential construction unless homes are connected to centralized water systems, regardless of existing zoning or available groundwater. It also empowers DEQ to inspect septic systems on private property, even without the owner's consent. This fundamentally erodes home rule authority and burdens counties like Marion with unfunded regulatory obligations.

Unjust Impacts on Farmers Without Clear Scientific Standards

Agricultural producers are unfairly targeted under SB 1154 -1. The bill:

- Fails to require scientifically proven causation before imposing regulations;
- Allows for restrictions based on correlations alone;
- Opens the door to mandatory recordkeeping and operational changes without due process.

This threatens our agricultural economy, which is a cornerstone of Marion County, by penalizing responsible land stewards based on unclear and potentially unverified data.

Convolutd Structure and Bureaucratic Burden

The dual classification system of “concern areas” and “management areas,” each with its own set of rules, committees, and reporting requirements, is overly complex and will confuse residents and burden local governments. The bill creates an administrative labyrinth that will result in inflated costs and decreased public trust.

A Better Path Forward

We urge the Legislature to pursue a more balanced and cooperative approach that:

- Prioritizes local Groundwater Advisory Committees with real authority;
- Ensures inspections respect private property rights and consent;
- Bases all regulatory actions on transparent, peer-reviewed science;
- Focuses on voluntary compliance, incentives, and public education.

Clean water is a priority for all of us. However, SB 1154 -1 attempts to achieve it by compromising too many of Oregon’s foundational values, local governance, fairness, privacy, and due process.

For the sake of our rural communities, agricultural heritage, and environmental stewardship rooted in collaboration, we respectfully request your NO vote on SB 1154 -1.

Sincerely,



Danielle Bethell
Chair



Colm Willis
Commissioner



Kevin Cameron
Commissioner