

April 16, 2025

Joint Committee on Ways and Means Natural Resources Subcommittee

RE: DEQ Budget

Co-Chairs Frederick and Levy, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Marisol De La Torre and I am the Legislative Advocate at Oregon Just Transition Alliance, a movement of frontline communities facing the dual dangers of environmental racism and climate change. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Department of Environmental Quality's proposed budget for the next biennium.

OJTA is an alliance that represents over 20 frontline communities of low-income, rural, BIPOC, and disabled folks who experience climate change and environmental health threats first and worst- ranging from people who deal with drought, contaminated well water, or exposure to extreme heat.

Oregon is facing an urgent climate crisis, and resolving it requires more than just limiting climate pollution. This means meeting the moment and giving our state's environmental protection agency adequate funding for critical programs- especially in light of federal threats against the environment. Historically, all 14 natural resources agencies comprise a total of 3% of the state's budget.¹ Out of that slice of the pie, there appear to be significant potential decreases to that three percent due to cuts to federal funding.² Of specific concern within the DEQ reduction are cuts to environmental justice programs that have been passed in recent years, such as heat pump deployment.³

We are concerned with any cuts or suppressed fee increases that would bring the agency under current service levels. For example, water quality and scarcity issues get attention, but not enough funding to address its root cause- something that parts of the large water package seeks to address. In 2020, OJTA hosted a statewide Listening Tour with our core alliance members and their rural community members. During that tour, many people voiced concerns about water quality and scarcity in various parts of Oregon, where industrial agriculture and logging have depleted and damaged vital watersheds. Since then, things have not changed for the better for these communities, and funding has not kept up for agency budgets.

¹ https://www.oregon.gov/das/financial/documents/2025-27_gb.pdf at p. 13.

²

<https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/lfo/JWM%20Documents/2025-27%20Co-Chair%20Budget%20Framework.pdf> at p. 4.

³

<https://www.oregon.gov/gov/regional-solutions/Documents/20250220%20EJC%20Meeting%20Agenda.pdf>



We would be concerned for example, about the elimination of three water quality positions for permitting and TMDLs,⁴ when lawmakers should be adding positions to ensure water quality—especially in light of federal rollbacks. We are also disappointed about the elimination of the *one* position responsible for implementing the cumulative health risk pilot program, since the link to health impacts to frontline communities around pollution are great. We recognize the importance of fully staffing an agency to ensure the efficiency and success of its programs.

OJTA wants to build a healthy and thriving Oregon for everyone, and Oregon has a strong track record of advancing environmental protections. We urge you to resource our agencies to continue being environmental leaders.

Thank you.

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⁴ (Total Maximum Daily Load under the Clean Water Act)