

Good Afternoon Co-Chair Sollman, Co-Chair Ruiz and Members of the Committee, for the record, my name is Jeff Parker, and I am the President and CEO of Northwest Youth Corps.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of the Higher Education Coordinating Commission Workforce Programs, specifically the Oregon Conservation Corps. I am here on behalf of the hundreds of OCC graduates who have launched their wildfire career and the thousands of Oregonians whose properties have been protected from catastrophic wildfire by the leadership investment the Legislature made when it created the Oregon Conservation Corps in 2021.

The Oregon Conservation Corps was established with the dual purpose of providing community wildfire protection to high-risk communities while training the next generation of wildfire and climate response workers. This afternoon you have heard from practitioners, program alumni, property owners and fire professionals about the impact of this innovative program.

I strongly urge the Ways and Means Committee to fully fund Office of Workforce Investments initiatives and to provide \$10 million in base funding and \$5 million in match as described in SB 82 which left the Senate Natural Resources and Wildfire Committee with a unanimous Do Pass recommendation. This investment will continue the Legislature's commitment to solving our wildfire crisis and investing in our workforce.

I want to thank this committee for its leadership in our state's response to our wildfire crisis. Your continued support for the Oregon Conservation Corps provides an innovative, low-cost intervention that protects our most vulnerable resources while investing in our greatest asset. Thank you for your leadership on this initiative.

I'll close with a brief quote from a homeowner in Douglas County who shared this comment with us yesterday. She wrote: *"As a retired person, I'm not capable of physically doing the rugged work (nor can I afford the cost) done by this amazing crew of five skilled, tireless and tenacious young people. They not only worked wonders, but while joining them during their few, short breaks, their respectful, winsome demeanor filled me with hope and appreciation for the younger generation. Weeks later, I'm still smiling from the experience."*

Thank you.