

Submitter: Andrew Hall
On Behalf Of: Citizens of Oregon
Committee: House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB947

Honorable Members of the Oregon Legislative Assembly,

I respectfully oppose Senate Bill 947, which replaces "militia" with "National Guard" in Oregon's statutes and eliminates the "unorganized militia." While modernizing terms may seem reasonable, this bill undermines Oregon's historical, legal, and cultural traditions, as well as citizens' rights. Below are key concerns, urging you to reconsider its passage.

1. Erosion of Constitutional Significance

The term "militia" is rooted in the U.S. and Oregon Constitutions. The Second Amendment ties the militia to a free state, and Oregon's Constitution (Article X, Section 1) defines it as "all able-bodied citizens" of certain ages. Replacing "militia" with "National Guard" risks implying the militia is only a federalized force, severing its broader citizen-based role and weakening constitutional protections.

2. Elimination of the Unorganized Militia

SB 947 removes the "unorganized militia," comprising citizens aged 18–45 not in the National Guard (ORS 396.105(3)). This group is a vital reserve for state emergencies, like wildfires or civil unrest, when National Guard resources may fall short. Eliminating it could hinder Oregon's ability to mobilize citizens, leaving the state reliant on limited forces.

3. Legal Ambiguity

Substituting "National Guard" for "militia" creates ambiguity. The National Guard operates under dual state-federal authority, unlike the state-centric militia. This change could confuse the Governor's authority, especially in independent state actions (e.g., ORS 396.130). It may impose federal restrictions not applicable to the broader militia.

4. Undermining Civic Duty

The unorganized militia embodies civic responsibility, encouraging citizens to serve in crises. Removing this concept diminishes recognition of this duty, potentially discouraging community preparedness. This is critical in Oregon, where natural disasters demand robust citizen response.

5. Insufficient Justification

SB 947 lacks a clear rationale for redefining the militia or eliminating the unorganized

militia. Such a significant change requires public debate, which has been absent. The bill's readability score (64.9) suggests accessibility, yet there's little effort to inform citizens of its implications.

Conclusion

SB 947 threatens Oregon's militia framework, emergency response capacity, and civic traditions. I urge you to reject this bill and preserve the militia, including the unorganized militia, as a cornerstone of Oregon's heritage and security. Strengthen citizen preparedness instead of dismantling this structure.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Andrew Hall
Salem, OR