

## Jefferson County Fire and EMS Building Expansion/ Remodel Project

### Capital Funding Support Testimony

My name is Jeff Blake, Fire Chief Jefferson County Fire & EMS.

It is important that I testify in support of our 1.9-million-dollar expansion of our existing fire station. The total project cost is 7.2 million dollars.

Our project is under construction we have walls up and the roof structure on. If the capital funding request is funded, we will be able to remodel the existing older portion of the station.

My department is a midsize department in Madras, serving the Jefferson and SW Wasco County residents providing fire and EMS services to 22,000 permanent residences within a 200 sq mile fire district and an unfunded ambulance service area of 1100 square miles that protects the many travelers through our area. Last year we ran 3500 calls for service with about 1/3 of those calls being related to the houseless population and drug crisis plaguing Oregon.

We are a department that is proud of our 40/60 male and female employee ratio, working out of a station that was built in 1989 as a volunteer station. We simply do not have enough office space, bed space and facilities for this diverse workforce.

As I am sure you are aware Jefferson County is the 2<sup>nd</sup> most distressed county in the state of Oregon. Our millage rate is 1.18/1000 which is 82 cents below the state average for departments our size. Rural departments like mine have very little funding options and have not received any revenue for houseless related issues even though we are the frontline responders to the homelessness and drug crisis.

We survive on taxes and fees for service for our fire protection and EMS services. However, we continually lose funding from Urban Renewal Districts and decreasing Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements and tax limitation policies. In some cases, we do not get any reimbursement at all. Sixty percent of our calls are Medicaid or Medicare, which our fire protection budget is used to offset costs. Our budget simply does not allow my organization to improve our facilities without some sort of assistance.

When you provide both fire and medical service to rural Oregon the unfunded mandate of providing ambulance service to every square mile of Oregon and a lack of volunteerism plaguing smaller departments in order maintain quality service and response, we must rely heavily on full time employees to respond to calls, which drives up our operating budgets.

Any funding for our building expansion project will go a long way to easing some of the burden on our department and its employees. Funding this project will help us better serve our community and our houseless population that is continuing to grow.

Thank you for your service and consideration, I am happy to answer any questions.

Jeff Blake, Fire Chief,

Jefferson County Fire & EMS

