

Submitter: Richarda Tapken
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB926

Dear Oregon Legislators,

I am Cara Tapken, a survivor of the 2020 Santiam Fire, writing to urge your support for Senate Bill 926. This legislation is a lifeline for wildfire victims like me, whose lives were shattered by the negligence of electric companies like PacifiCorp. SB 926 prohibits utilities from passing negligence costs to customers, halts profit distributions while debts to victims remain unpaid, ensures fair compensation with appropriate interest rates, and protects us from tax burdens on hard-fought judgments.

The Santiam Fire, linked to PacifiCorp's negligence, uprooted my life. Fearing recurring wildfire danger and discouraged by Oregon's forest management failures, I fled across the country in 2021, severing ties with family, friends, and community. The isolation drove me back, but I had sold my Lyons home and another back east. Attempting to rebuild, I bought land for stability, only to face homelessness for over a year after a lender misled me during construction financing—a cascade of financial and emotional devastation tracing back to that fire. While the lender's misconduct deepened my losses, the root cause remains the wildfire that destroyed my home, security, and well-being.

It's excruciating to watch utilities operate as usual, shielded by legal teams, seemingly unmoved by the human suffering they caused. SB 926 corrects this gross imbalance by holding negligent utilities accountable, ensuring they cannot burden harmed communities further or reward shareholders while delaying our justice. For those of us navigating the wreckage of decisions made in the shadow of these fires, this bill is more than policy—it's a step toward recognition and fairness.

Thank you for your leadership on SB 926. Please vote yes to restore justice and protect Oregonians from further harm.