



To: Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue

From: Chief Brian Stewart
Clackamas Fire District
Oregon Fire Chiefs Association

Chief Ben Stange
Polk County Fire District No. 1
Fire and EMS Chapter of SDAO

Date: June 4, 2025

Re: SB 454 -2 - Support - Rural Fire Protection District Task Force

Chair Meek, Vice Chair McLane, and Members of the Committee:

The **Oregon Fire Chiefs Association** and the **Fire and EMS Chapter of the Special Districts Association of Oregon** represent over 300 fire agencies, over 80% of which are rural fire protection districts. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment today in support of SB 454 -2.

We appreciate this committee's attention to the critical issue of funding for rural fire protection districts, many of which operate under increasing demands with outdated financial structures that no longer meet the realities of modern emergency services. While termed rural, these agencies serve diverse areas. Of the 240 cities in Oregon, there are less than 50 city fire departments – most cities are served by rural fire protection districts.

In June 2024, thirty fire service professionals, representing the breadth of the fire service, spent two days discussing the state of the Oregon fire service and challenges it faces. Underpinning all of the issues that the fire service identified (e.g., EMS, workforce, regulations) is funding. While well known to individual agencies and long-discussed between fire districts and departments, this two-day discussion highlighted the extent of that inadequate funding impacts services – rising to be a critical issue in the workgroup's report [Convening of the Oregon Fire Service 2024 – Summary & Solutions](#).

Across Oregon, rural fire districts face severe and growing challenges:

- Limited **property tax revenues** due to statutorily limited permanent rates and compression do not meet the cost increases of equipment, capital assets, or personnel services.

- Rising call volumes, including **all-hazard responses, the opioid-crisis, and houselessness EMS calls**, stretch well beyond the original mission envisioned when many of these districts were formed.
- A workforce that is increasingly strained, as the **costs grow annually** for recruiting, training, and retaining qualified personnel grow annually.

SB 454 -2 offers a valuable opportunity to **identify both the statutory and structural limitations** that prevent rural fire districts from keeping pace with community needs. We believe that a targeted, data-informed analysis—like the one proposed in this bill—will help bring visibility to systemic funding inequities and unlock strategies for improvement.

We urge the committee to consider SB 454 with the -2 amendment as a meaningful step toward modernizing Oregon’s approach to rural fire protection funding. The needs are real, the gaps are growing, and without action, public safety across Oregon will continue to erode.

Thank you!