



June 10, 2025

To: Senate Committee on Rules

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Bonham, and Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Cheyenne Holliday, and I serve as the Advocacy Manager at Verde. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 1154, a long-overdue and critical update to Oregon's Groundwater Quality Management Act.

Originally passed in 1989, the Act was designed with the important goal of protecting Oregon's groundwater and the communities who depend on it. More than three decades later, however, it is clear that the law has not lived up to its promise. In practice, vague statutory language, undefined agency responsibilities, and limited accountability have hindered effective implementation. As a result, many Oregonians—particularly rural communities, low-income families, and communities of color—have borne the burden of groundwater contamination without the information, tools, or power to protect themselves.

At Verde, we work to build environmental wealth and resilience in frontline communities—those historically excluded from environmental decision-making and disproportionately exposed to environmental harm. Through our work in the Oregon Water Futures Collaborative, we've had the opportunity to listen to community members across every region of the state. The stories we hear are consistent: people don't know what's in their water. Families are drinking from contaminated wells. Neighborhoods are navigating fear and uncertainty while the systems meant to protect them remain opaque and unresponsive.

One stark example of these systemic failures is the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area (LUBGWMA). For over 30 years, the region has struggled with dangerous nitrate contamination, yet progress toward clean water has been slow and inconsistent. Why? Because the existing law lacks clarity and fails to provide a framework for coordinated, accountable action. SB 1154 is designed to ensure this does not continue—there or anywhere else in Oregon.

This bill addresses the root of the problem by making the following improvements:



1. Clarifies state statute and agency authority by establishing a proactive framework that allows Oregon to identify and respond to groundwater contamination before it becomes a full-blown crisis.
2. Strengthens coordination between state agencies, ensuring that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and that agencies can work together efficiently and effectively.
3. Creates mechanisms for accountability, requiring timely, transparent, and effective implementation of the law.

Equally important, SB 1154 centers community engagement. It strengthens local advisory committees to ensure they are functional, informed, and genuinely connected to decision-making processes. This is not simply about checking a box for public comment—this is about recognizing and incorporating local knowledge and lived experience as essential components of better, more equitable outcomes.

Environmental justice is not only about addressing pollution—it is also about designing systems that prevent harm and empower people. SB 1154 moves us in that direction. It protects not only a critical natural resource but also the health, dignity, and future of the people who rely on it every day.

Oregon now has a chance to move beyond decades of stalled efforts and deliver meaningful, lasting protections for groundwater and the communities who depend on it. SB 1154 is an opportunity to learn from past failures and build a system that works—justly, efficiently, and proactively.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge your support of Senate Bill 1154.

Thank you for your time and leadership,

Cheyenne Holliday
Advocacy Manager, Verde