
June 9, 2025

To: Senate Rules Committee

RE: Support for SB 1154 (Oregon's Groundwater Protection Law)

Chair Jama, Vice Chair Bonham and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Jamie Pang, and I am the Director of Programs at the Oregon Just Transition Alliance (OJTA). We are a member-based alliance of urban and rural communities across Oregon, representing thousands of people who experience environmental harms first and worst— including alliance members that suffer from wellwater contamination. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 1154-A3 today.

In 2020, OJTA organized a statewide Listening Tour that brought together Oregonians from across the state to gather insights that shape our policy efforts today. During the tour, many alliance members and their communities voiced concerns about their water quality and scarcity, where agricultural and logging activities have depleted and damaged vital watersheds. Yet more than 80% of Oregonians currently rely on groundwater for their drinking water.¹

Since then, groundwater contamination has only increased,² indicating a real need to update the 1989 Groundwater Management Act to be more impactful.

OJTA is supportive of the bill's first-of-its-kind community engagement effort and the requirement of a groundwater management committee to have at least two members who rely on domestic wells to help develop voluntary implementation plans for ground water quality concern areas.

Perhaps more importantly, SB 1154 gives agencies the authority to enforce standards in addition to relying on voluntary efforts to reduce pollution. Once a groundwater quality management area has been established, SB 1154 requires the Department of Agriculture to

¹ Groundwater Quality Protection in Oregon: 2021-2024 Report, available at <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/FilterDocs/gwLegRep2023.pdf> at p. 3.

² <https://www.oregonlive.com/environment/2025/01/nitrate-contamination-has-gotten-worse-in-eastern-oregon-over-the-past-decade.html>.

adopt and implement area-specific rules to regulate contaminants and requires the Oregon Health Authority to develop and implement a public health response plan. We believe that such a process is necessary for accountability to the communities harmed by decades of inaction.

However, due to the historical inaction on wellwater contamination, we are a little disappointed there are not more specific actions for agencies to address Ground Water Quality Management Areas – such as directing ODA and DEQ to review and amend CAFO and WPCF³ permits to prevent groundwater pollution – which appeared in the -1 Amendment. Having more specific triggers direction will ensure that inaction like that in the Lower Umatilla Basin never happens in another EJ community.

Everyone has the right to clean water and a healthy environment. This legislature has an opportunity to correct historical injustices and to update a 36 year old law. We urge you to pass SB 1154, and to do so in a way that would provide for the strongest health protections and remediations for impacted communities.

Thank you.

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³ Waste Pollution Control Facility.