

Written Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1585

Submitted by: Robert Cowie

City Councilor, City of Chiloquin

Executive Director, Chiloquin Visions in Progress

Re: SB 1585 – Matching Grants for Small Cities

Testimony

Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Robert Cowie. I serve as a City Councilor for the City of Chiloquin and as the Executive Director of Chiloquin Visions in Progress. This local nonprofit partners closely with the City on parks, youth programs, and community projects.

I am writing in **strong support of Senate Bill 1585**.

SB 1585 addresses one of the biggest barriers small rural cities face when applying for state grants: **the local match requirement**. While grants are often described as “available,” the reality for small cities is that required matches of 15 percent or more can make projects financially impossible, even when the need is urgent and the community support is strong.

Chiloquin has a population of under 800 residents. Our tax base is limited, our utility rates already exceed affordability benchmarks, and our general fund must stretch to cover essential services. In this context, stringent match requirements do not encourage investment; they can **exclude small cities entirely**.

SB 1585 creates a fair and realistic framework by setting **reasonable caps on matching requirements based on city size**. For cities with populations under 5,000, limiting match requirements to 3-5 percent is not only appropriate but also transformational. It turns projects from “unfundable” into “achievable.”

This bill would have a direct and practical impact on community infrastructure projects, including **parks and recreation improvements**. For example, in-ground irrigation systems, picnic areas, restrooms, and ADA upgrades are all capital construction projects that improve public health, water efficiency, and community resilience. These are exactly the kinds of projects small cities want to pursue, but often cannot because of the match requirements.

Equally important, SB 1585 allows grant funds to be used for **planning, engineering, and design**, not just construction. This is critical for small cities that lack in-house engineering staff and must rely on consultants to develop compliant, fundable projects.

SB 1585 does not lower standards, eliminate accountability, or create new spending obligations. It simply recognizes that **one-size-fits-all matching requirements do not work** for rural Oregon.

I urge you to support SB 1585 to ensure state grant programs are accessible to all cities—not just those with the largest tax bases.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Cowie