



Chair and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the businesses and communities we represent in rural Southern Oregon, I respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 1553.

Rural Oregonians are already struggling with affordability. Many of our residents live on fixed incomes, are retirees, or work in low-wage industries such as hospitality, agriculture, and small retail. Utility costs are not discretionary expenses — they are essential to heating homes, operating small businesses, and sustaining basic quality of life. Any action by this Legislature that increases energy costs will disproportionately harm rural communities.

SB 1553 is deeply concerning for several reasons.

First, the bill is retroactive and interferes with ongoing litigation. The Legislature should not insert itself into active legal proceedings in a way that changes the rules midstream. This raises serious due process concerns and undermines confidence in Oregon's legal and regulatory systems.

Second, the bill applies to only one specific utility, creating what appears to be a special law. Oregon's Constitution expressly prohibits special legislation targeting a single entity. Laws of general applicability are appropriate; punitive laws directed at one company are not.

Third, SB 1553 requires the utility to pay federal taxes on behalf of class members awarded damages, imposes additional escrow requirements on top of existing court bonding obligations, and redirects punitive damage awards into a state-managed fund. These provisions go far beyond addressing wildfire recovery. They impose extraordinary financial burdens that would negatively affect the company's financial standing.

If this legislation passes, it is highly likely to negatively impact the company's credit rating. That in turn increases borrowing costs. Higher borrowing costs do not disappear — they are ultimately reflected in customer rates. In rural Oregon, that means higher monthly bills for families who can least afford them.

Additionally, this measure would undermine the utility's ability to attract investors and secure financing for critical infrastructure upgrades. Rural communities depend on reliable service, modernization of transmission systems, and wildfire mitigation investments. Increasing financial instability makes those investments harder and more expensive.

At a time when affordability is front and center for Oregonians, SB 1553 would punish not only the company but its customers — many of whom had no role in the underlying events. Rural residents should not be collateral damage in a policy dispute.

We recognize the seriousness of wildfire impacts and the need for accountability. However, Oregon needs comprehensive, forward-looking wildfire solutions that balance accountability, resilience, and affordability. Targeted, retroactive, and punitive legislation aimed at a single entity does not advance that goal.

For rural Oregonians living on fixed incomes and small businesses operating on thin margins, even modest increases in energy costs can mean the difference between staying afloat and closing doors. We urge you to reject SB 1553 and instead pursue balanced solutions that protect both wildfire victims and ratepayers.

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