



OREGON VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION

“Representing Those Who Volunteer”

Testimony of Genoa Ingram
Oregon Volunteer Firefighters Association
In Support HB 2564
House Revenue Committee
February 16, 2011

MEASURE: HB 2564
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HOUSE REVENUE COMMITTEE
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The Oregon Volunteer Firefighters Association (OVFA) represents emergency medical technicians, (EMTs) and firefighters across Oregon. Our membership is comprised of both volunteer and combination (volunteer responders working alongside paid firefighters) fire agencies. Some of these are special fire districts while others are city fire departments.

The OVFA is a 501(c)(3) organization that provides hardship grants (\$500), death benefits (\$1,000 per incident), equipment grants (up to \$2,000), text book grants (two each year at \$1,000 each), nearly \$10,000 in education grants for member firefighters and their family members, and contributions to much needed training efforts such as the Oregon Fire Instructors Association (OFIA) Safety Symposium (\$2,000). Grant and scholarship recipients must make application to the OVFA and a selection committee carefully considers each submission and chooses the successful candidates. In the case of a death, a check is cut immediately upon request by the district or department, no questions asked. Additionally, proceeds from an auction held at the annual conference goes to benefit the Oregon Burn Center. These are just a few of the charitable contributions by the OVFA.

The OVFA is a dues-based organization that is constantly exploring creative ways to raise funds, whether it be raffling off a classic car that has been donated, seeking federal grants, or even (in previous years) telemarketing.

In the winter of 2008-09, the OVFA set out to make application for the charitable tax check-off. We discovered that under ORS 305.727, the Association would be required to gather 10,000 signatures and show a gross income of at least \$1 million for the year prior to application. While the signature gathering is not a problem for volunteer firefighters, the \$1 million certainly is. HB

2564 remove the \$1 million barrier for OVFA and allow the Association to move forward with the application process.

During the 2009 Legislative Session, an identical bill, HB 3414 passed the House unanimously and received positive testimony by the Oregon Department of Revenue indicating that there was no negative impact to the Department. Similarly, there is no known negative impact on the Charitable Tax Check-off Commission.

In these very difficult economic times, a segment of our population is willing to step up and provide vital public safety services to their communities, often with significant out-of-pocket expense. Not all costs are reimbursable and any chance at attraction and retention methods such as tax credits melted away with the economic forecast. The tax check-off will not impact Oregon's budget and will allow taxpayers to choose to support their volunteer firefighters by allowing the OVFA to continue to provide recognition and benefits to members and their families.

We urge your support of HB 2564 and thank you for your consideration.