

February 14, 2012

Testimony to the committee on the Cougar Bill (House Bill 4119)

Chair _____, and members of the committee,

My name is Donette Jewell-Calkins. I live at 4302 Airport Road, Sweet Home, Oregon, 97386. I work for Sweet Home School District # 55 in the Transportation Department as a Secretary and I drive a Special Needs route.

I support the House Bill 4119 being heard today because the number of sightings of Cougars in our town and the surrounding area has become very alarming. They are becoming very bold and our children, pets and us are in danger.

For the second time in two months, drivers in our district have come very close to cougars. This time it was up close and personal for me. It darted out from the left bank of the road at a dead run in front of me. I was driving a suburban at the time at about 25 – 30 miles per hour down Fern Ridge Road to Hwy. 228. I hit it quite hard, squarely on its right side, but at the speed it was running across the road, it continued down into some brush and briars on the right side of the road. It was still dark, but my assistant and I both knew what we had hit. Her first instinct was to get out of the vehicle to check for damage until I stopped her, then she realized how big the cougar was. I did not know how injured the animal was or if there was any damage to the vehicle. I radioed to dispatch that I had hit a cougar and they wanted me to continue on my route and to report in if I was having any mechanical problems and not to check it out there. The area has several houses about a quarter of a mile from the city limits.

The first encounter by a driver was actually in Cascadia and a driver spotted a cougar at a bus stop where she needed to let off two students at home. She contacted dispatch and the parents were called to come to meet the students at the stop. She did not allow the students off the bus until their Dad got there to get them.

These animals are getting too close to our children, pets and community. There have been several sightings in the city limits and I also have had another encounter about 6 months ago when a cougar actually came up on our back patio. It stared in at my mother and I for what seemed like a very long time until it just walked away. We were sitting at our dining room table. My neighbor has dogs, but they were in the house at the time. These encounters are very scary because the cougars do not seem to have any fear of being close to humans anymore. They are making our towns their territory. They need to go back into the remote mountain and forest areas before someone is killed or maimed severely.

Hunting the ones that are so close to us is probably the only way to alleviate the danger to our kids and our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and I will answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Donette Jewell-Calkins