



**Curry County
Board of Commissioners**

David Brock Smith, *Chair*

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Dear Senator and Representative,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you on June 3rd regarding the difficult task ahead of your committee, your colleagues, Governor Kitzhaber and our great states struggling counties. As a political subdivision of the State of Oregon, counties play a vital role in the overall health and welfare of the citizens of the state. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to work together towards that goal, as healthy counties support a healthy State of Oregon. To that end, I must agree with Governor Kitzhaber as, "Unprecedented action is needed to tackle unprecedented circumstances facing the state's timber counties that are on the brink of insolvency". Curry County is past the breaking point and action must be taken to ensure the livability of our county and the safety of our citizens.

Curry County has 22,364 residents and encompasses 1648 square miles of the Southern Oregon Coast and 67 % of this land is managed by the federal government. Of these residents, 57% live in the unincorporated areas of Curry County and 43% live within our three incorporated cities. Curry County collects 22 million dollars in property taxes, although we receive only 1.4 million dollars of that revenue to fund county services. 30% of our property owners do not reside within our county. 18% percent of our residents meet the poverty level and our current seasonally adjusted unemployment rate is 10.8 percent. Our median age is 54 years young and Curry County also has 3,716 veterans, which is the highest percentage per capita than any other county in the state. Curry County Commissioners of the past had the forethought decades ago to move departments from the county to stand alone districts such as our hospital, libraries and ports. More recently, Commissioners have moved Home Health & Hospice and our Health & Human Services departments to stand alone none profits so that these departments may stay viable and continue to deliver services to our citizens while limiting the financial liability to the county.

My board and I adopted our 2013-2014 Fiscal Year Budget today. In this budget, we have budgeted for 6 sheriff's deputies, although only 4 deputies have been employed and we have been unsuccessful in filling the other two positions due to the financial uncertainty of the county and our low salary package. We will continue to operate the jail for the next year, with Sheriff Bishop's efficiencies of our 911 communications dispatchers also watching the monitors viewing our inmates and unlocking the electronic door locks for the corrections officers in the jail. Without any other sources of revenue, these three departments alone mentioned above staffed at their current inadequate levels exceed our 2.1 million dollar annually new

discretionary revenue. This \$2.1 million dollars of annually new discretionary revenue is derived from \$1.4 million in property taxes and the remaining from other fees and taxes. If other sources of revenue are not realized, this would leave no revenue to fund any other departments within the county. Within our budget for this 2013-2014 fiscal year, we are literally utilizing our one time set aside monies of unemployment and PERS reserves and that of our working capital to make it through one more budget year at the current inadequate service levels until July of 2014. I feel obligated to do this as I feel it is my duty to keep our citizens as safe as possible with the resources we have available. After July of 2014, we will have less than 1 million dollars in reserves to operate all the county services for its citizens and the State of Oregon. Without a funding solution passed by our citizens or state assistance through the legislation HB 3453 currently being discussed, our dire fiscal situation would mean closing departments. These departments could include but are not limited to; our Jail facility, Sheriff Patrol, Juvenile Probation services, District Attorney services, Assessment & Taxation, Clerk, Election and Recording along with other departments that directly affect our citizens and the State of Oregon.

As a political subdivision of the State of Oregon, we must remember that counties play a vital role in the overall health and welfare of the states citizenry and that healthy counties support a healthy State of Oregon. When considering HB 3453 to assist Curry County, the amount in question needed to fund the minimum adequate service levels of public safety would be \$3.8 million for the fiscal year. With the current language in HB 3453 of a 50% funding support match from the State of Oregon, the amount needed would be no more than \$1.9 million for the fiscal year. I would like to point out that this funding support can be reduced from that of the State and the citizens of Curry County if we look at the consolidation of redundant services throughout the county. For example, Curry County owns the communication towers associated with 911 communications throughout the county, has a secured 911 dispatch center and trained personnel. This service is duplicated for the City of Brookings in south county which provides its own 911 dispatch for the city and a limited number of surrounding districts. This duplication of service has caused a split in the 911 fees from the citizens and state paid to the county to fund its' 911 communication services. The city is in no way capable physically or financially of taking on 911 dispatch communication services for the entire county. Whereas, Curry County is physically capable; has the necessary infrastructure and would be financially capable if consolidation of this service would occur. This consolidation would also assist in the formation of a desired county wide 911 district supported by these fees as a standalone district.

When looking at and discussing consolidation of services as well as inter-governmental agreement language proposed in HB 3453, we must remember that counties, such as Curry, are a political subdivision of the State of Oregon and any agreements must be crafted with the Board of Commissioners as the county governing body authority. Furthermore, the sovereignty and constitutional authority of the Sheriff and the Board of Commissioners must be preserved. To that end, an effort of the consolidation of duplicated services should be a factor within any intergovernmental agreements negotiated for the best interest of the citizens and as long as

said agreements do not jeopardize the sovereignty and constitutional authority of the Board of Commissioners and Sheriff.

Aside from the aforementioned consolidation, any other such agreements should be temporary, be negotiated by and have approval of the majority of the Board of Commissioners with consultation of the Sheriff. Once the Board of Commissioners and Sheriff can show that adequate levels of funding for law enforcement services exist, said agreements will be terminated if it is shown to be in the public's interest by the Board of Commissioners as the county governing body.

My board and I want to sincerely thank you for your consideration of the lifesaving bill before you. I appreciate the thoughtful work that has been done and the thorough tasks that lay ahead. Again, "Unprecedented action is needed to tackle unprecedented circumstances".

Very Respectfully,

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