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Monday, March 18, 2013

Senate Committee on Judiciary

- Sen. Floyd Prozanski, Chair
- Sen. Betsy Close, Vice Chair
- Sen. Jackie Dingfelder
- Sen. Jeff Kruse
- Sen. Arnie Roblan

Re: SB 71 Exemption for Model Aircraft

Dear Sen. Prozanski, Members of the Committee;

Thank you for taking the time to consider my concerns related to SB 71. While I'm sure this bill is well intentioned, as a model aircraft enthusiast I am concerned that it will make our club flying sights – and therefore the organized hobby – unnecessarily vulnerable.

I have served as president or secretary of the Mt. Silverwood Radio Control Aircraft Club in Mt. Angel since 1999. I have been active in the hobby since 1974 when I was 13 years old. As an adult, I have helped many youth, young adults and even a few retired folks get their start in modeling.

When my son turned 8 years old, he reminded me of a promise I'd made years earlier – to teach him to fly model aircraft. Later that month, I took him to a school yard and he experienced his first flight. He was ecstatic and learned very quickly. School yard flying has its drawbacks, so we joined the local club and have been members ever since. My son now services F-15s for the Oregon Air Guard, and is a certified Airframe and Powerplant Mechanic. There was a direct link between the education and family values of this hobby, and his chosen profession.

Club flying fields are an investment. They require a lot of maintenance and care, and can be impossible to replace once lost. We have worked hard on our field to improve its safety and ascetic values over the years. We have strict rules limiting flying hours and distance from the field to minimize disturbance to neighbors. We require members to be approved by experienced pilots before flying solo, and only pilots who are insured by the Academy of Model Aeronautics are allowed to fly at our field.

But SB-71-4, as currently written, enables serious penalties for activities that are necessary for safe operation. The proposed statute may make sense for unmanned aircraft that are operated for law enforcement, government or commercial purposes, but are in specific conflict with our long-held, safe and accepted modes of operation.

As a leader within this organization, I urge you to consider the simple amendment as brought forward by the Oregon Model Aircraft Alliance. It is consistent with federal law and will, I believe, help us protect our most valuable asset, our flying fields.

SECTION 1. As used in sections 1 to 7 of this 2013 Act:

- (1) 'Drone' means an unmanned flying machine that is not a model aircraft.**
- (2) 'Public body' has the meaning given that term in ORS 174.109.**
- (3) Model aircraft" means an unmanned aircraft that is:**
 - (a) capable of sustained flight in the atmosphere;**
 - (b) flown within visual line of sight of the person operating the aircraft; and**
 - (c) flown for hobby or recreational purposes.**

One note: To those of us involved in this hobby, it is the educational value and the social enjoyment that many of us value most. We export this to the community at local festivals, Independence Day celebrations, school projects, and other community benefits. One small change to this bill will help us ensure our continued existence. We sincerely appreciate your taking the time to consider our concerns.

Sincerely

Randy Henry
Silverton OR