

Testimony before the House Committee on Energy and Environment

My name is Amy Sager Patton, I am from Southern Oregon, and have been volunteering and working for several years to provide outreach to well owners about naturally occurring arsenic and fluoride in the area, and about nitrate contamination concerns for private wells in some areas. I write today in support of House Bill 4125.

I am a Registered Geologist, a practicing Hydrogeologist. I have worked for 8 years as an environmental consultant and worked 9 years at the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) as Manager of the Groundwater Protection Program following passage of the Groundwater Protection Act in 1989.

The DEQ groundwater protection program was general funded and has since lost much of its base funding. In 2013, the legislature approved additional laboratory resource enabling the state to continue limited groundwater quality investigations. *But the state still has little knowledge about the general background groundwater quality in many areas.*

More than 70 percent of Oregonians get their drinking water from groundwater, and over 90 percent of the state's public water systems get their drinking water from groundwater. Twenty-three percent of Oregonians are dependent on well water for all of their water needs. And yet, no testing is required for domestic wells (except for 3 elements at property transfer – and this doesn't always happen if there is not a bank involved).

No water testing is required when a new tenant moves into a rural property. However, because we live in the U.S.A, most homeowners expect that the water coming out of the tap will be clean.

In one memorable case, I had conducted a free nitrate test at a local event and the results were off the charts – higher than our testing method could read. When the Hispanic family with young children returned for their results, I had to explain that their well test results were above the drinking water standard which can be a health hazard for babies, pregnant women and the elderly or immuno-compromised. They told us they had been renting their house for years and had no idea of the poor water quality. They did not have funds to purchase an expensive treatment device for the house nor authority to influence the home's septic system or the agricultural land uses surrounding the house that had possibly caused the contamination in the first place. All we could do was to provide them with information and advise that they discontinue drinking the water from the well.

House Bill 4125 would have prevented this scenario. The bill would assist the landlord in repairing their well or installing a water treatment device. So there would not have been a question of the tenants being provided water from a contaminated source. And the tenants would have had proof of that, in the form of

lab reports from an accredited laboratory (and hopefully some interpretation of what they mean!).

It is essential that the well tests required by this bill are also required to be conducted by an accredited laboratory. Otherwise, the results are meaningless.

The funding HB 4125 would provide for County Health Departments and other local organizations for well testing and public education would also be wonderful. I have been doing this for 6 years in Southern Oregon as a volunteer and through various grants. Every audience I have is surprised to learn about naturally occurring arsenic and fluoride and about nitrate contamination. Very little information is provided to well owners currently because most county health departments are only funded to oversee public water systems and have insufficient funding to expand their services. Yet these are the organizations the public expects to inform them of potential health hazards.

I urge the passing of this important bill that will improve the safety of many Oregonians. Please support this bill with your vote.

Sincerely,
Amy Sager Patton
Hydrogeologist
9 Hillcrest Street
Ashland OR 97520