

Testimony in support of Senate Bill 1563

My name is Amy Sager Patton, I live in Southern Oregon, and have been volunteering and working for several years to provide outreach to well and septic system owners about nitrate contamination concerns for private wells in some areas. Nitrate is a common groundwater contaminant in some areas of Oregon, and is generally caused by failing on-site septic systems and/or agricultural activities in rural areas. Elevated nitrate in well water supplies can cause health concerns for infants, pregnant and nursing mothers, the elderly, and immuno-compromised. Water supplies near failing septic systems can also be contaminated by bacteria or other chemicals disposed in the septic system. I write today in support of Senate Bill 1563 to address these concerns.

More than 70 percent of Oregonians get their drinking water from groundwater. Twenty-three percent of Oregonians are dependent on well water for all of their water needs. A large percentage of these residents live in unincorporated areas (31% of Jackson County residents live in unincorporated areas), which have little access to sewer systems. Water supply and sewage treatment is solely the responsibility of the property owner in these areas, with assistance from the state only when requested and when resources allow.

Senate Bill 1563 would provide a useful resource to rural residents who find themselves with a failing system, which may be contaminating their (or their neighbor's) water supply, or contributing to contamination of a lake, stream or estuary. The bill will increase the chances that these failing systems will be addressed by granting homeowners access to affordable loans, allowing them to replace their systems or possibly hook up to a sewer system at a reasonable cost.

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
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