

Comments to House Committee on Energy and the Environment,  
Hearing Room D, Oregon State Legislature, March 13, 2017.

Good afternoon. I am Dr. Theodora Tsongas. I am an environmental health scientist with 40-years' experience evaluating the health and safety impacts of environmental contamination. Formerly, I was an environmental epidemiologist with the Oregon Health Division, where I coordinated the Hazardous Substances Emergency Events Surveillance System, tracking spills or hazardous materials releases in Oregon. I have held appointments as Adjunct Associate Professor of Community Health at Portland State University and of Environmental Health at the University of Colorado at Denver. I am a member of the Environmental Health Working Group of Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility and a community member of the Multnomah County Local Emergency Planning Committee.

I am here today to support HB 21<sup>3</sup>~~4~~1 and HB 3344. I live in Multnomah County and am familiar with the risks associated with oil unit trains coming through the state. I have spent the past three years tracking the health hazards associated with dangerous trains and coal, propane, LNG, and oil export terminals. These risks exist throughout the state, along the rail lines, not just in Multnomah County, where 20% of the population lives and works within the blast zone of oil trains. Multnomah County is only one of the many counties that could be affected. What we value of life and property are at risk now along the rail lines. These bills are designed to protect human life and property. The health and safety risks are many: fires, explosions, derailments and oil and hazardous materials spills, the potential to contaminate precious drinking water supplies, destruction of valuable habitat and agricultural land, increased wear and tear on rail beds from longer, heavier trains traveling at increasing speeds. Diesel emissions and fine particulates, heavy metals, as well as other toxic constituents of the hazardous materials are released into the environment through normal

railroad and terminal operation as well as accidental leaks, spills, and releases.

We know the risks from experience in Mosier, where the public health impacts included evacuation, school closure, hazardous air quality, loss of drinking water system, loss of sewer system, contamination of ground water and the Columbia River. We need to consider the long term as well as the short term impacts of incidents like this one: mental trauma to children and residents, impacts of inhalation exposure to the smoke and particulates released by the explosion and fire, damage to feelings of a safe and secure home, economic near ruin of the city, loss of property values and income from tourism. And these continue with the drain on economic resources to repair the damage and the permanent loss of resources such as forests and crops.

Railroads operating high hazard train routes must be responsible for the risks incurred by their activities.

That is why I fully support these two very important bills, *with minor amendments* to help protect the health and wellbeing of the people of Oregon.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Theodora Tsongas, PhD, MS  
Portland OR 97215