

I only received notification of the hearing on S.B. 1000 today. I hope that this testimony arrives on time to be entered and considered on this bill.

The Oregon State Defense Force (ORSDF) was established to be a force multiplier for the Oregon National Guard (ORNG) in times where the ORNG received federal activation. This was its mission when I joined the ORSDF about twenty years ago. While I served with the ORSDF the mission slowly started to morph as members within the ORSDF started to realize that there was a missing mission with Oregon that could be well served by the ORSDF. As more and more members acquired their amateur radio licenses, the ORSDF mission moved to emergency communications support. As it became apparent, through assistance provided for such needs as the Vernonia floods and various “assists” with the ORNG, that the ORSDF had found a niche within which it was becoming a good fit, the mission morphed into providing liaison services between the various Emergency Operations Centers (EOC) and the Oregon Military Department (OMD). Training was established to qualify and certify members of the ORSDF as liaison officers for their respective county EOC’s. It was during this time that I became a member of the Oregon Emergency Managers Association (OEMA) and started working more closely with a couple of past association presidents, one of which was my county emergency manager, to establish protocols and procedures to ensure the best possible support to the EOC’s by the ORSDF liaison officers. Several events of significance occurred during this period:

- The ORSDF held semiannual training events at Camp Rilea, on the Oregon coast where formal communications exercises were carried out. Through successive exercises, the ORSDF honed their skills as communications teams by testing the passing of simulation messages from a staged EOC to a staged Joint Operations Center (JOC). Eventually, these exercises attracted the attention of high ranking members within the Oregon Emergency Management community who would provide invaluable feedback to the highest ranking members of the ORSDF. These exercises became invaluable in assisting the ORSDF in honing their skills as communicators, and providing information instrumental to improving the training as liaison officers.
- During one of the semiannual training events, a member of the ORSDF was in a bad traffic accident after having been mobilized for the exercise and while in route to the exercise. The State of Oregon would eventually be called upon to cover the costs of the considerable medical expenses, as the member was on an active mobilization by a state entity.
- Through my own interactions with the state emergency managers, I became aware that there was no formal documentation that clearly delineated the role of the ORSDF in emergency management. Through discussions with two past presidents and others within the OEMA, it was determined that with an updated letter stating its mission, the ORSDF could and would become an invaluable asset to the emergency management function within Oregon. I made this need

abundantly clear to the commander, but either through poor management or a lack of proper interest, the letter was never written or sent.

- At some point, it appears that some level of animosity grew between the OMD and the ORSDF, as a move to disband the ORSDF started to grow out of the OMD. The many successes and accomplishments of the ORSDF were summarily ignored, and the incident of the traffic accident and subsequent liability for medical treatment seemed to become the rallying cry of a small handful within the OMD to disband the ORSDF. It appears that a rumored difference of personalities gave those within the OMD the ammunition necessary to push for the disbanding of the ORSDF. There is no official record of such differences other than discussions within and between members of the ORSDF, so I offer this only anecdotally.
- There was a hearing on the House Bill that would become the demise of the ORSDF with the only rational and reasoning being offered for the bill being the cost to the OMD for covering liability of the ORSDF during deployments. It was made relatively clear that prior to the incident used, there has been no cost of substance, yet the push to disband the ORSDF remained. Several members of the hearing questioned the reasoning behind the disbanding rather than suspension, with no realistically viable reason being given. When asked what would be done to fill the liaison void left by the disbanding, the ORNG was offered as the replacement.

I would like to point out that to date, there has been precious little done to fill the much needed liaison void by any qualified amateur radio qualified personnel. As I retain personal contact with many of those that would be qualified to provide the necessary training for such communications, I know that there has been very little serious movement to train any that would fill the liaison need. I can also offer that the OMD holds communications tests monthly between the JOC and the various armories around the state where only a small and insignificant number of armories respond.

Items that should be considered in light of this legislation are:

Twenty-two states within the United States have some form of Defense Force. Many of them serve an emergency management role of some form. (Washington State's Washington State Guard is currently implementing training and practices with closely mirror the mission the ORSDF had and is being very well received within their emergency management community)

The ORSDF liaison role was to provide current and up-to-date situational information to the JOC. This information was intended to be used to anticipate requests for military asset requests. By being able to anticipate such needs, the OMD could activate and stage these assets so that when the actual request filtered its way through the formal request process, the assets would be ready to deploy. Such

anticipation capability could potentially save many lives, as the time taken for the formal request and subsequent activation could be mostly avoided.

In both practice and exercise, ORSDF personnel were actually dispatched to the incident, allowing information from the incident to be real-time and best formatted for consumption and use by the OMD.

As a paramilitary organization, training and exercises could be formulated and structured to meet the needs of the emergency management community and the OMD.

As a paramilitary organization, qualifications and procedures could be far more easily be tailored to conform with the needs of the emergency management community and the OMD.

As a paramilitary organization, standards and procedures could be more easily developed, disseminated and implemented that would closely conform to the needs and practices within the emergency management community and the OMD.

Should a desire to reinstate the ORSDF under its liaison mission become a consideration, the following impediments would need to be overcome:

- The highest levels of the ORSDF would have to be filled by personnel that not only understood the relevance and merits of the mission, but believed in the ability of ORSDF personnel to fulfill the mission and were able to fully support it. The lack of support and belief in the mission led to the circumstances that became the demise of the ORSDF.
- The OMD would need not only to accept the mission of the ORSDF, but provide adequate support and access so that the mission could be properly trained for and access granted for exercising for the success of the mission. There were several occasions where the ORSDF provided personnel and support to significant exercises where the ORSDF truly excelled well beyond expectations.
- The OMD would need to accept that there will, occasionally, be minimum costs that should be borne. The return on investment can easily be proven to have been minimal and well worth the costs borne in the past. Many personnel within the emergency management community were impressed and at time very surprised at the abilities and performance of ORSDF personnel.

It also needs to be stated that ORSDF personnel gave freely of their time and resources to ensure that the best possible performance and outcomes were achieved. This must be considered no small asset to a state that sits under several threats of significant disasters.

In closing, I would like to offer that some of what I have stated will not be taken well by those that were adversely involved with the ORSDF. The fact remains that the

ORSDF was not only a viable entity, but a much needed one. This has been borne out by the lack of its mission replacement. The current moves to replace its mission are moving far too slowly and are not adequately staffed or supported. You can easily ascertain what I've presented by asking to be shown what liaison services are currently available, how reliable such services are and would these services adequately fill the need they are intended to fill.

Shifting the ORSDF away from its mission to support the OMD, and replacing it with the Oregon Civil Defense Force places an additional burden on entities that are not fully prepared to absorb such responsibilities and that could far better use the funds that would be required to be allocated for such an entity within their current mission. As part of this legislation, you must look at what the ORSDF was, the mission it performed, the manner in which it performed the mission and the successes it enjoyed with the mission.

I believe with full sincerity that should this committee chose to take my testimony seriously and elicit full and adequate testimony, you would probably question the necessity of this legislation as well as the reasoning behind the original disbanding of the ORSDF. I would state again that the mission the ORSDF worked, trained and exercised for is still not adequately available and remains a very much needed component within the emergency management community of Oregon.

Truly yours,

Eric J Polson, CWO2 (*signed*)

Former Communications Officer (S6) for the 41st ROG, ORSDF