

To: Ways and Means Subcommittee on Capital Construction
From: Gina Hartzheim, City Planner, City of Milton-Freewater
Hearing Date: May 19, 2017
Re: Testimony in Support of SB 5530

Good afternoon. Thank you for accepting written testimony on this important bill. My name is Gina Hartzheim and I am the City Planner for the City of Milton-Freewater. I have been employed by the City for 25 years, a good portion of which was spent in somewhat ignorant bliss with regard to floodplain management. Our City borders the Walla Walla River levee system. Up until approximately 10 years ago, our floodplain maps consisted of two 11"x17" panels that were produced in 1978 and the entire City was mapped an innocuous Zone "C". In 2007 a series of events occurred, the one most recognized being Hurricane Katrina. That event put into motion additional events that hit much closer to home, and bring me to the reason I am writing in support of SB 5530.

There is approximately eight miles of levee located within the Milton-Freewater area. The levee was originally built in 1951 and underwent reconstruction in 1966. Up until the year 2010, the Milton-Freewater Water Control District was receiving only approximately \$24,000 per year to maintain those eight miles of levee, a woefully inadequate amount for anything other than annual weed control for the most part. Along those eight miles, the City of Milton-Freewater and its Urban Growth Boundary abuts the levee for a distance of 3.7 miles, almost half the distance of the system. Based upon the protection of the levee, to my knowledge any property located within the City had never been mapped in a flood zone and property owners were not required to purchase flood insurance. Fast forward to the year 2007, at which time the Water Control District was advised by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that deficiencies had been found in the levee system and the levee would be decertified if not corrected by the following year. Several attempts were made at passage of a new levy for the necessary repairs without success. Subsequently, the levee was rated unacceptable and then decertified. This was at the same time that FEMA had undertaken their nationwide remapping program in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. As funding grew short for that project, mapping was done with resources which resulted in inaccurate maps. Preliminary FIRMs were produced showing essentially the entire City in a floodplain. An unsuccessful appeal of the maps was made to FEMA to 2009 at a cost to the City of over \$5000. The maps became final in September 2010 and our path into floodplain regulations and flood insurance requirements for thousands of parcels began.

Thankfully, during the time of the preliminary map review, Governor Kulongoski designated the repair of our levee as an Oregon Solutions Project. That process gathered approximately 25 different partners from local, state, federal government representatives as well as community leaders and representatives. I feel the needed interchange between all of these agencies would not have been possible

without the involvement of Oregon Solutions. I am confident that without the invaluable assistance of and partnership with the Oregon Solutions Team we would not have been able to achieve what seemed to be an absolutely insurmountable goal of getting our City and citizens out of a floodplain, allowing development without the additional requirements of elevation, and removing the need for annual flood insurance premiums. However, this did not come without a price. There was an additional approximately \$30,000 spent by the City during that process.

Ultimately, a successful 2.8 million dollar levy was passed by the voters and an additional 2.8 million dollar lottery bond was received which allowed the Water Control District to hire an engineering firm and contractor to do the work required in order to submit for a Letter of Map Revision to FEMA. Thankfully, our story has a good ending. We were successful in our LOMR with FEMA and the bulk of the City was re-mapped to an area not requiring flood insurance. I reference the dollar amounts in order to bring to the Committee's attention the enormous amount of investment that is required for maintenance and repair of levee systems throughout the State and is simply not available to communities without some kind of assistance.

I urge support and passage of SB 5530. Thank you for your time.

Gina Hartzheim
City Planner