

Eastern Oregon Counties Strongly Support Senate Bill 432-13

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 432. The eight counties listed below strongly support the -13 amendment. Our collective counties face declining populations, aging demographics and shrinking school enrollment. In short, we are not thriving. Left unchecked, this could lead to completely depopulating large portions of the state. Returning to a state of healthy, sustainable growth is the top priority for our counties.

SB 432-13 provides local governments in eight Eastern Oregon counties the flexibility and authority to compete with neighboring states for economic development opportunities without jeopardizing existing industries and businesses. Encouraging development in our region should not be viewed as a negative - on the contrary it should be a positive. To the extent that the current land use regulations (including the “exceptions process” outlined in ORS 197.732) hamper our ability to develop, we need the ability to move beyond those constraints. SB 432 will not solve all our problems but instead gives us an additional tool to use, should we choose to do so.

You will undoubtedly hear criticism from those who assert the result will be the destruction of agricultural land and uncontrolled development without appropriate infrastructure, etc. Please remember, we live in the communities where the impact of these decisions will be felt; we will protect the needs of farming and ranching because they are integral to our communities both socially and economically. In addition, it’s important to note the voluntary tools provided by SB 432 will no longer apply should our counties begin to grow. This would be a great outcome.

For years, we have watched as laws are continually changed to ensure that key businesses in the metropolitan areas of the state are able to expand or remain in the area. While we are not likely to attract similar industries, we need the same support from our state leaders in order to have a better chance to compete for rural-based business opportunities. We are not asking for additional state resources, we simply ask for a measure of self-determination that will allow us to put our best foot forward for both our existing businesses and new companies that may seek to relocate to our part of this great state.

We the undersigned urge you to support Senate Bill 432 with the -13 amendment.

