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Testimony to the House Committee on Energy and Environment on HB 2124 and HB 2725

February 1, 2017

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council supports HB 2124 and HB 2725.

I served as OEC's representative on the 22-member wood smoke work group convened in response to HB 3068 of 2015 (sponsored by Rep. Johnson).

The work group delved deeply into the health concerns of wood smoke pollution, the economic needs of communities particularly affected by wood smoke pollution, cultural values around fireplaces and wood stoves, the potential solutions to wood smoke pollution, how biomass fits in, and more. Across the board, the committee members took this issue very seriously, and the members of the public we heard from were all quite concerned about how wood smoke impacts their health.

I was very impressed by local efforts to address wood smoke, from Klamath Falls to Oakridge, from Pendleton to Washington County. As one example, before starting a wood stove replacement program in 2000, the City of Pendleton surveyed its residents and found that there were about 800 uncertified wood stoves in the city and that a third of the survey respondents had experienced health problems due to air pollution. A combination of grants from U.S. HUD, EPA and perhaps other sources allowed Pendleton to work with residents to provide interest-free loans to replace 186 wood stoves with new EPA-certified heating systems (142 natural gas stoves, 22 wood stoves, 12 pellet stoves, and 10 electric or other). Pendleton also started a 7th grade Air Quality Education program at Sunridge Middle School in 2000, and that program is still running strong. Pendleton's residents are breathing purer air, and the city is meeting federal standards for particulate pollution.

Pendleton's experience is just one example of how local communities will take action to reduce wood smoke pollution when they have the resources to do so. To that end HB 2124 and HB 2725 are devised to help locals meet the challenge.

HB 2124 allows the existing Residential Solid Fuel Heating Air Quality Improvement Fund to provide not only grants, loans or other subsidies, but also *rebates*, for replacing or removing an uncertified solid fuel burning device.

HB 2725 is based on the work group's recommendations and creates a grant program for providing funding to local service providers to develop and implement wood stove replacement rebate programs.

OEC supports these bills because funding is definitely needed for community-based education/outreach programs and to help households replace their wood stoves with better alternatives, especially low-income households.

OEC has additional policy ideas that would move the needle faster. For example, the state could require that real estate agreements disclose the health hazards of wood smoke when the home being sold contains a fireplace or wood stove. The state could require registration of wood-burning devices so that we understand the full extent of the problem and can target programs even more effectively (for commercial establishments and households above a certain income, a small fee could be applied to run the registration program and support education/outreach programs).

One particularly frustrating thing is that some communities are allowing the problem to get worse. Recently a new restaurant featuring wood-fired pizza opened up in my neighborhood. While the pizza's certainly tasty, I question why Portland, a city with a very dense population and serious air toxics issues, would allow new establishments to open up with wood-burning devices. In part it's a general lack of awareness of just how unhealthy wood smoke is.

A combination of education, incentives, and in some cases policy solutions, is needed to clean our air and improve the health of Oregonians in large and small communities all across the state.

Thank you for your consideration. OEC hopes you will support HB 2124 and HB 2725.