

To: The House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness
Date: February 7, 2018
Re: Comments on HB 4004

I am Dr. Theodora Tsongas, an environmental health scientist with 40 years' experience in environmental public health at Federal and State agencies, including the Oregon Health Division (Oregon Health Authority), academia, and in the private sector. I have held teaching appointments at the University of Colorado, Washington State University, and Portland State University. For the past several years I have been a member of the Multnomah County Local Emergency Planning Committee.

I urge you to protect Oregon communities from the next oil train derailment and spill by passing HB 4004. As a community member and a health scientist, I believe we cannot afford to lose this opportunity for meaningful legislation to protect our communities, our health, our rivers and streams, our water supplies, and to have a way of saying to the risk takers making a profit that they have to make sure that they are taking full responsibility for their actions. HB 4004 is a major step in giving us the capability to respond more capably to oil spills that happen with great frequency. HB 4004 may also act as an incentive for the railroads to take more effective steps to prevent spills before the damage is done to our health, our natural resources, our communities, and our economy.

The reasons are many, but most important is prevention. We must do everything we can to prevent dangerous spills and releases and the contamination that results. As we have seen from the derailments of oil trains and resultant spills, explosions and fires in Lac Megantic, Quebec, with 49 lives lost and a town demolished, and in Mosier, Oregon, with a town water and sewage system disabled, the townspeople exposed to hazardous smoke and air pollutants, as well as the long term and untold mental health impacts on children and adults, many of the adverse impacts cannot be mitigated, and those that can are very costly, and can be ruinous.

Another reason is the increased frequency of oil trains through populated areas: as an example, up to 12 trains a week transport 1,000,000 gallons of crude oil through Multnomah County, where more than a quarter of the population lives within the half-mile "evacuation zone" along the rail transport route. Over \$25 billion dollars of improved property is within a half mile of rail lines in Multnomah County.

Train derailments occur on average every 3.5 days in the Northwest US. With derailments the risk of oil spills, fires, and explosions increases.

Oregon has the weakest laws on the West Coast for oil train emergency response and financial responsibility. We need to do more to protect Oregon communities. We simply cannot afford to do anything less. Please pass HB 4004 to address this need. Oregonians will remember your work when the next oil train derails in one of our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns.