

To: Rep. Brian Clem, House Committee on Agriculture and Land Use Chair

Cc: Rep. Susan McLain, Rep. Bill Post, Rep. Shelley Boshart Davis, Rep. Ken Helm, Rep. David Brock Smith, and Rep. Anna Williams.

Re: HB 2456

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you the position of the Oregon Land And Water Alliance (OLAWA) on House Bill 2456.

OLAWA is a 501c3 non-profit group based in the rural areas surrounding Sisters, Oregon. OLAWA advocates for the protection of our land use laws and sustainable water policies while educating ourselves and our fellow citizens about current issues relating to these important matters. OLAWA actively monitors, analyzes, and raises awareness of issues affecting residents and visitors in Central Oregon.

I am authorized to make the following statement by the Board of Directors of OLAWA.

The unstated assumption in HB 2456 seems to be that Oregon's existing land use laws deter growth, and that an exemption from land use laws to permit additional disbursed residential developments will promote growth. However, there is no evidence offered or cited to support this assumption. And we believe that nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, studies show that rural counties in all our neighboring states, and indeed throughout the entire USA, have not been growing significantly ever since World War II, and are often actually losing population regardless of whether their land development practices are regulated or not. This trend was aggravated by the recent Great

Recession, but it has continued unabated both before and since the recession.

In 2017 the Washington Post's Wonkblog published a national survey that shows that this is in fact a widespread national trend that continues today throughout the United States. See, [The Places Where Americans Are Dying Faster Than They Are Being Born](#), March 30, 2017.

The real reason that rural counties are not growing in modern America is that most new jobs are now in the cities where the necessary infrastructure is already in place to support economic development, and where transportation of both raw materials and finished goods can be facilitated. In Oregon those facilities are typically found along the Columbia River and the I-5 corridor. And traditional agricultural, timber, and mining jobs that used to support a rural economic base have been increasingly mechanized so that less labor is needed.

In promoting HB 2456 many of the proponents of this bill are shooting at the wrong target (Oregon's Land Use Laws) simply because that is the target that they would most like to damage. Our land use laws have not caused population growth to lag in rural Oregon counties.

Population growth in rural Oregon counties has been slowing and declining since the 1950s; well before our land use laws were ever put in place. Senate Bill 100 first gave birth to Oregon's land use system in 1973, and that system wasn't even fully implemented until the 1980s.

Those seriously looking for policies that would actually reduce the population and employment problems of rural Oregon will need to look elsewhere. If and when there are additional housing needs for rural Oregon residents, these needs can best be met within the existing towns and cities in these communities. Authorizing additional disbursed rural residential development is not a solution.

Fortunately some good guidance is already available as to what should be done to assist rural communities in Oregon. A recent Oregon study,

The Employment Landscape of Oregon, was published in May 19, 2017, by the Oregon Employment Division. The study documents the employment and demographic challenges of rural areas, and in its Executive Summary that study concludes that “Limited infrastructure reduces options for rural businesses transporting goods to metro markets and increases the difficulty of recruiting new businesses to rural areas.” (Page 2.)

This conclusion is referenced throughout the body of the report as well. For example in the Introduction on page 3 it is noted that “rural Oregon needs improved access to infrastructure in order to get rural goods to market.”

And beginning on page 26 there appears an entire section titled “Infrastructure Needed to get Rural Goods to Market” that is devoted to this conclusion. That section begins with the statement that “The lack of critical infrastructure is one of the more observable challenges faced by rural communities. Businesses concentrate where they can easily get the supplies they need and transport the goods they’re making to markets.” An investment in infrastructure improvements that will enable heavy truck transport and commercial air service is cited as a key component of any change for the better. “And that investment is needed prior to rural economies achieving a more connected appearance in order to draw the businesses they need to thrive.”

But notably no mention at all is made regarding Oregon’s land use laws. These laws are simply not a factor in holding back the economies of rural Oregon.

The take away conclusion should be straightforward. If we are indeed serious about boosting the economy of rural Oregon, then we should be expanding ConnectOregon grants and improving rural highways, airports, railway and broadband connections, rather than undercutting Oregon’s land use laws.

In short, it is the position of OLAWA that HB 2456 does nothing to solve the problems of rural Oregon, and it does not represent good public policy for this state.

Please let this bill die in committee as it should.

Thank you,

Oregon Land And Water Alliance

By Paul J. Lipscomb, Vice President