



The League of Women Voters of Oregon is a 99-year-old grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.

February 21, 2019

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Senator Kathleen Taylor and Representative Jeff Reardon, Co-Chairs
Members of the Committee

Email: jwmnr.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov

Re: **HB 5017 and 5018** – Dept. of Environmental Quality Budget and Fees – **Support**

The League of Women Voters has strong positions on both water quality and quantity, as well as air quality, solid waste and hazardous waste—perhaps every program that DEQ oversees. LWVUS was active in encouraging passage of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts and continues to advocate to protect that foundational work. We also advocate for federal funding to implement that legislation, an issue of grave concern today. In Oregon, members have studied these issues, recognizing the value of having clean air, clean water and land for public health for today and generations to come. With that background, we provide testimony today on DEQ’s proposed budget.

We support the General Fund, Lottery Fund and fees for the base budget/activities of the department. We are dismayed by the “cuts list” that reduces needed staff, particularly in the area of water quality. Although this department has monies from a variety of sources, **the entire dollar amount still does not provide the full funding needed to be sure both administration and enforcement of the federal Clean Air and Clean Water Acts are fulfilled. The General Funds in this budget, as well as permit fees, protect Oregonian’s health and support our economy. We will target the most important of the most important Policy Option Packages (some of which did not make the Governor’s budget)...understanding that Oregon will still not be fully addressing public health and protection of our environment.**

Air Quality (POPs 116 & 119): We support and were actively engaged in the [Cleaner Air Oregon](#) project, providing input on the rulemaking, including providing fee data from other states, in order to address this very real public health issue. Now that the Environmental Quality Commission has adopted a plan and initial fees were adopted in [SB 1541](#) (2018), **it is time to authorize the positions needed to implement this important work. We expect to see fair, reasonable and adequate fees adopted later this year to truly fund the program long term.** We support a relook at the Key Performance Measures for this division, but agree with Co-Chair Reardon that assuring the measurements provide data around program outcomes are the measurements needed—not just counting permits processed.

Water Quality (POP #120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 127-modified, 128, 129, 160 (See also [SB 756](#)—but at \$1 million), 161, 164): We support and are actively engaged in the water quality programs of this agency. We served on the “Blue Ribbon Committee” and as a member of the stakeholders group helping to develop and advocate for the **2015 Budget Note** around finding solutions to wastewater permits. We followed up by participating with the contractor during their work. They have provided the department and this legislature with a **path to a solution** to this extremely important public health AND economic issue. **Now is the time to invest in the improvements needed to get permits processed by providing technical assistance staff as well as additional permit writers to implement the new 10-year work plan. We understand that there will need to be a substantial fee increase—fees that will surely be**

passed on to our members indirectly helping to pay for these fees through municipal wastewater bills and possible higher costs of products. **But there is nothing more important to Oregonians around our environment than clean water.** These permits may require industries and local governments to expend dollars to upgrade facilities that are not currently meeting water quality standards. So **getting a handle on water infrastructure needs to be considered in 2021 is important.** And continuing to address the funding of the Clean Water State Revolving Fund with administrative needs will help small local jurisdictions in updating their water infrastructure. As we focus on housing this session, it is important to link this infrastructure with increased density targets and to help small rural communities add to their housing stock.

Dangerous blue green algae blooms are becoming more common. It is a public health crisis that the legislature recognized in the 2018 session by providing DEQ and the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) monies to address this issue. We have supported [SB 27](#) (in the OHA budget) so that drinking water systems can be tested and new technologies explored, but **the laboratory work by DEQ is also essential.** No one wants to go through another crisis as occurred in the City of Salem. The Dept. of Agriculture also has a role to play in helping restaurants deal with such a crisis.

We are pleased that the [Integrated Water Resources Strategy](#) has been updated and can be used as a guide for all the water-related agencies. **Although we continue to have multiple agencies whose budgets are worked separately by the legislature, the League sees the various agency budgets as working together toward a positive outcome for the state.** We are supportive of [HB 2084](#), extending the Place-Based Planning efforts in four sections of the state. We bemoan the lack of funding to increase that work, although you will see a continued funding request in the Water Resources budget for these current efforts. I mention this because DEQ is a partner, along with the Dept. of Agriculture, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Watershed Councils and many local groups, landowners and the public where, working together, they may provide guidance on specific actions, including the need for more conservation and storage projects to address current and future needs.

The League asks that these agency budgets be viewed in total and not in isolation. It does no good to invest in one place, while taking away from another, when the issue being addressed requires ALL HANDS ON DECK!

Agency Management (POP 140): We are pleased that the agency has moved toward Stage Gate 3 and the software being considered is an off-the-shelf product already being used by 11 other states in order to update their electronic data management system. **Data-driven policy decisions will provide the best outcomes and help focus limited state dollars on the programs that will help us meet the goal of abundant clean water and clean air for all in the future.** We understand that this system will, in some way, connect with other agency data systems and/or provide data accessible to other agencies that may help with other agency permitting responsibilities. It is important that the information is accessible to all, including the general public.

Climate Change: The League believes that addressing Climate Change, both by reducing greenhouse gases and by providing for mitigation and adaptation, is one of this legislature's most important jobs. We support [SB 2020](#) relating to a cap and invest program, because the usual expectation that "the solution to pollution is dilution" cannot be counted on as we know there will be reduced snowpack and drought conditions in the future throughout Oregon. And increased temperatures will affect Oregon's air quality, especially in our more urban areas, while wildfires may affect rural Oregonians. **These may well be life or death decisions you are making.** To that end, the League is an *amici* with Our Children's Trust in a lawsuit against the State of Oregon and another lawsuit against the United States. We do not take such actions lightly. But **we cannot ignore what is happening to our planet.** The role of DEQ may change if the legislature adopts a new [Oregon Climate Authority](#), but the work currently being done by DEQ will need to continue by some agency. Oregon's newly adopted [Statewide Transportation Strategy](#) will play a role in reducing greenhouse gases in our transportation sector.

Land Quality (POPs 131, 132 and 134): The League supports [SB 40](#) and [SB 41](#) related to increased fees to address heating oil tanks, oil spill prevention, transporting of hazardous materials by rail and emergency response work. We look forward to legislative action on other bills around this important issue. No one wants to even imagine another oil spill in the Columbia River Gorge—nor in Portland neighborhoods or anywhere in Oregon. But, if that horror should occur, we must have planned for a quick response.

There will be other bills related to the mission of DEQ over the next few weeks about which we may well provide comments. After all, **DEQ is at the core of Oregon's public health and environmental protection.** It has a broad mission that, if fulfilled, affects every Oregonian. Investing in its many responsibilities is money well spent.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.



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