

June 11, 2019

Rep. Nancy Nathanson
House Revenue Committee
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Nathanson & Members of the Committee,

As you consider Senate Bill 431, you will likely hear a lot about the economic and environmental value of the managed floodplain located behind the 27-mile levee system that runs along the Columbia River in Multnomah County. You may also hear about the important public infrastructure located in the area. As a resident of the East Columbia neighborhood, situated directly behind the levees, it's important to me that you also hear the perspective of someone who relies on the levee system to safeguard my life, my family, and my home every day.

You've undoubtedly seen the news coming out of the Midwest this year as communities have been decimated by terrible floods. Although we have been fortunate in recent years, we must remember that we are not immune to flooding. In fact, we've had four 100-year and two 500-year floods at the confluence of the Columbia and Willamette Rivers over the last 125 years. Perhaps most well-known of these floods is the Vanport Flood of 1948 that killed at least 15 people and left another 18,000 without homes. This flood was caused by a breach in the railroad embankment at the far western end of the levee system. Although the embankment was repaired after the flood, it was never built to be a levee and it continues to be the greatest source of uncertainty and risk to this day.

Although our levee system has endured three major floods since the Vanport Flood of 1948, there is a lot more at risk behind the levees today. On top of this, the levee system really began to show signs of its age during the most recent high-water events on the Columbia in 2011 and 2017. We must not take our levee system for granted.

As a homeowner in the managed floodplain and active member of my neighborhood association, I've had the great honor and responsibility of being elected to serve on the board of the Peninsula Drainage District #2, one of the four drainage districts that would be absorbed into the Flood Safety & Water Quality District if SB 431 is enacted. As a resident and drainage district board member, I have seen how inefficient and challenging it is to manage one large infrastructure system through four separate special districts that are insufficiently equipped to make the capital investments that are needed. We cannot continue to allow the levee system to continue with language under century-old governance and funding structures that were set up when the area was primarily farmland. I have been an active part of the partnership that helped developed SB 431 and would happily forgo my position on the drainage district board to know that this critical infrastructure system will be managed holistically and that it will have the resources needed to keep my community safe and dry.

Please stand with the 7,500 residents and 59,000 employees that rely on the levee system. Please vote yes on Senate Bill 431.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



Maryhelen Kincaid
Resident of East Columbia