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STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 20



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 4, 2020

Senate Committee on General Government and Emergency Preparedness
Oregon State Senate
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Colleagues:

Senate Bill 1537 (SB 1537) advanced by Governor Kate Brown and her team represents a significant step forward. The measure outlines substantial investments, establishes expectations, and provides us all with an important starting place for the enduring discussion of what we must do to responsibly prepare for future catastrophes. Although the trajectory of the measure will likely not include our House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness, I can say that as chair, I believe it would enjoy bipartisan support.

I write this letter to share some thoughts about the key elements of the omnibus measure. To begin with, I believe with the right sideboards (in terms of cybersecurity, operational testing, and objective milestone evaluations), the “Shake Alert” project will become a critical early warning system that will pay dividends in lives saved and property salvaged. While early warning systems based upon emergent technologies are often fraught with risk, this opportunity – under the right leadership and systems safeguards – should be able to become operational absent major challenges.

The investments in “staging areas” included in the measure will provide the backbone for pre-disaster placement of equipment, facilities, and resources. This provision fits nicely with the work our committee has been doing over the past two sessions. We have a standing workgroup dedicated to development of a tiered network of rally points, response facilities, refuge and staging areas; the initial ten (10) staging areas could serve as a backbone to the eventual buildout of this network: providing our state with an enormous new capacity for effective disaster response and post-catastrophe recovery efforts. Accordingly, I invite all and any interested parties to join our “Open Spaces” workgroup for the development of future possibilities.

SB 1537 also addresses one of the largest “hidden in plain sight” public safety threats: aging infrastructure – especially dams. Upgrading the safety and security of all dams, private as well as public, is an important priority for all concerned with long-term public safety. SB 1537 implements a statewide lens for improving the safety and security of these critical pieces of our infrastructure. I want to emphasize my support for this necessary step forward. We must find a way to improve the sustainability of all private and public dams before we realize the dangerous consequences inherent to these critical nodes.

SB 1537 focuses significant talent, time, and treasure upon the goal of creating a “two-week ready” standard throughout the State of Oregon. As written, the measure includes investments for a statewide awareness campaign and staffing within the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to expand regional self-reliance (through the initial phases of a catastrophic event). I believe this investment could yield significant benefits if, and when, OEM is more closely aligned with the needs of local, regional, and tribal emergency service providers. I write this because of a growing consensus among emergency management stakeholders that our statewide structures and systems need modernization for 21st Century realities.

Another measure: HB 4041 (before our committee) seeks to address improved alignment of statewide structures and systems. It will unlock the potential of SB 1537: yielding greater certainty for intended outcomes as well as an enhanced voice for the folks “on the ground” serving our communities. Although final disposition of HB 4041 has not been determined, the function of the measure will provide for greater local, regional, and tribal involvement in emergency management decision-making; increased clarity in role and responsibilities of agencies with an Emergency Support Function (ESF) mission; and greater protections for volunteers who answer the call when disaster strikes.

In closing, I want to reemphasize my support for SB 1537. We have failed to invest in our statewide emergency preparedness structures and systems for far too long; this measure is a key starting point to adequately resourcing our disaster response/recovery capacities. Together these measures can, and will, move Oregon forward.

Respectfully,



Paul L. Evans
Chair, Oregon House of Representatives Committee on Veterans’ and Emergency Preparedness
Oregon House of Representatives (HD 20)