

Dear Representatives Clem, Lewis, Marsh and any other Special Committee members,

My name is Mary Alexander, and I want to thank you all for listening to our community's stories last night. I sat through all four hours, and appreciated you providing this time for the community to share their experiences and testimonies.

I want to talk about how dangerous it is that in the geographical location we live in, we do not have a proper emergency alert system in place for warning the valley about encroaching wildfires. On the evening of September 7th, 2020, the air smelled like the whole town was burning, but still no alert or notification about hazardous air quality, or an approaching fire. Instead, the following afternoon my home had a 15 minute warning (thanks to a neighbor pounding on my door) to get out. By this point the field of dead grass was already a sheet of black. Two homes at the entrance of the park were fully burned down to the already melting frames. Several neighbors had to cross the creek on foot, with children and dogs. Our elderly neighbor, Wayne, who is a blind Vietnam vet couldn't drive or run to safety so he literally sat IN THE CREEK until someone found him hours later. This is just what happened to people who had homes. For those without internet or a phone, living on the streets...they are lucky they weren't swept up in the flames along the greenway. Much like with tornados in the Midwest, we need an outdoor warning system so a situation like this one doesn't sneak up on a whole county of folks. We also need some sort of emergency planning task force to help better prepare community members on the best way to handle another disaster like this one. As we have learned from some of our neighbors, disasters like this one can strike a region more than once in a lifetime.

We are so lucky the death toll wasn't higher during the fires, but the treatment of my fellow community members post-fire has been appalling. I am really sad about the way my government has handled this disaster... It's winter in Oregon and although we don't have snow down here in Jackson County, it gets damn cold in the evenings. So many people are in tents on the side of the roads, crawling on top of family members in overly crowded houses, or bleeding

themselves dry paying for hotel rooms. The other folks are facing extreme cruelty at the hands of law enforcement. Camps being destroyed and carefully curated resources being thrown in the dumpster without a second thought. If these people aren't even allowed to freeze in a tent, where are they supposed to go? All affordable housing has been burned to the ground. As someone who one of MANY volunteers working hard to find tents for people to pitch, clothes on their back and food in their bellies, it really cuts me deep to see these things thrown in the trash. For these people to be treated like trash. Like they are nothing. We need to ease

As wonderful as last night was, it wasn't made accessible enough for folks to attend. I only found out about the meeting after a perfectly timed drop-in at the Fire Relief Station at exit 24 in Phoenix. It also bothered me that there wasn't 2-way translating happening for the entire meeting. I have attended other privately organized, publicly shared meetings so I also know this is possible. I also can think of countless people, if asked, that would have happily done so for the duration of the meeting. There was already a real-time accessibility issue for older folks, homeless folks and those who don't speak English well. Considering how these are the populations who have been hit the hardest, I would consider that a pretty gross oversight. All affected populations deserve access to information.

On to my affordability beef. I had the privilege to not be totally screwed by my insurance company at the time, State Farm, and didn't come out of this nightmare completely empty handed. However, I find it disturbing that I had to sign up for a 30-year mortgage, to pay for a house that is in a valley that very recently almost completely burned to the ground rather than pay \$1,400 for one of the few rentals available. The fact that some sort of cap hasn't been put on apartment rentals or hotel rooms is sickening. These people are profiting off of others lives being turned to ash. We need rental caps, and affordable places for folks to go who lost everything.

Lastly, I would like to share how stressful it has been for me personally to have lost my home 3 weeks before the start of my final year at Southern Oregon University. As if forced online

learning hasn't been bad enough, I have had a really hard time staying enrolled and completing my degree. I am a Human Services program member, and it is my duty to learn how to best help and serve the community I am a part of. COVID-19 already was making my education challenging, but this is so much worse. I am expected to perform at the same level as someone who didn't just have their whole world shook up and completely scattered. Some of the pieces of myself have traveled so far, I fear I may never see them again. SOU should have taken a pause to let people like myself have a chance to breathe and regroup. So many students, staff members and educators have lost their homes.

As I circle the drain, I will quickly recap my main points. We need an outdoor alert system and emergency task forces to prevent future devastation. We also need affordable housing, and for law enforcement to stop treating people and their possessions like garbage. We also need to make meetings, like the one on February 17th, to be accessible to all folks no matter what language you speak or time to attend the even as it happens. We can do better, TOGETHER!

Thank you for your time,

Mary Alexander