

Oregon Senate Committee on Energy and Environment

March 19, 2021

Members of the Committee,

My name is Alexander Lopez, and I am a State of Oregon Registered Geologist (G2145) with over 14 years of experience in the environmental remediation industry. I am submitting this testimony individually and in my personal capacity. I strongly support SCR-17 and urge the members of the Committee to do the same.

As an environmental geologist I have served in many capacities over the years. I have sampled groundwater at industrial facilities on the Willamette River, collected soil samples in Baker City, managed cleanup projects in Coos Bay, and consulted for insurance companies analyzing environmental insurance claims. I have even been a small business owner, offering environmental services to individual homeowners and other small businesses.

In my years of experience, I have seen a pattern emerge in how environmental cleanup projects are conducted. In general, the parties responsible for the contamination have the financial and political capital to challenge and negotiate for less robust remedial options. They hire small armies of consultants, lawyers, and lobbyists to ensure that the cleanup process reflects their priorities, often narrowly focused on doing as little cleanup as possible in order to drive down the cost of the cleanup.

In contrast, those individuals and communities impacted by the contamination are often left with little power over how remediation is conducted. While community members are stuck making futile phone calls to DEQ and waiting for opportunities for public comment, the responsible parties are producing volumes of detailed technical reports to support their positions. They can afford to do that. Community members generally cannot. And as usual, those individuals and communities with the least resources and political connections end up with the least power to demand more thorough cleanups.

But the problems faced by members of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities go beyond the inability to influence cleanup planning. It is well documented that a history of discriminatory government policies and land use laws has created generations of systemic, race-based, environmental inequality. These marginalized communities are more exposed to environmental contamination and more impacted by its harmful impacts. Because the current system of environmental injustice is firmly rooted in laws and regulations, a legislative remedy is necessary. SCR-17 will begin to lay the framework for a more equitable application of Oregon's environmental regulations. This change is needed to ensure that all Oregonians benefit from the state's environmental protections and have a voice in planning for a greener future.

I urge the members of the Committee to support SCR-17.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Alexander Lopez III, R. G.