

February 9, 2021

Representative Paul Evans, Chair
House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Management
Oregon State Capitol
Via virtual hearing testimony submission

RE: HB 2234 – Opposition to Section 5

Chair Evans, Vice Chairs Lewis and Meek and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share the perspective of the Oregon Fire Chiefs Association regarding House Bill 2234, which would change the building code standard for homes that have been damaged or destroyed in this past year's wildfires.

Oregon's fire service was quite literally on the front lines of this summer's battle to combat the wildfires that devastated homes, communities, individuals and families as they lost some, to everything. Our crews worked alongside others to try to save lives first and save homes and structures next. Unfortunately, the fires proved to have the upper hand in far too many cases.

As we now prepare for the 2021 fire season, we are working with local jurisdictions on how to rebuild. This includes fire stations that were destroyed as well as many homes and businesses. We understand the magnitude of this task and the many years it will take to find a new normal from this devastation. HB 2234 offers different options for this but in Section 5, does allow a building or structure subject to damage by wildfire to be rebuild to the building code in place with original permitting or conditional use approval. While we understand the intent of this element of the bill, we cannot support rebuilding that is not to the current building and safety code. Our job is to protect, and in order to meet that goal, we work to implement a strong fire code within building codes. This gives individuals the best chance to survive a fire if they are inside a structure, gives the fire service the best chance to save a structure and provides the best protection we can for those fire fighters who are entering the building and fighting the fire on the ground. It is essential that we maintain this current code when rebuilding to increase the chances for everyone if and when another fire occurs.

We will continue to work with local jurisdictions and stakeholders to facilitate the rebuilding our state will be embarking on while maintaining our advocacy for the best protections we can possibly provide.

We stand ready to answer any questions and provide further insights or information. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Chief Roger Johnson
Sister Rural Fire District
Interim Legislative Chair – Oregon Fire Chiefs Association