



Lake County Board of Commissioners

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Barry Shullanberger, Commissioner
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May 3, 2021

House Agriculture and Natural Resources

RE: SB-605 -6

Chair Representative Hudson, Vice-Chairs Breese-Iverson, McLain, and members of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources committee.

My name is James Williams, I am a County Commissioner and Chair in Lake County, Oregon. I also sit on the AOC Governance and Revenue Steering Committee as Vice-chair.

I am testifying today in opposition to SB 605-6 as written. At first glance, I could see some strong arguments on both sides of the issue. I decided to share it with my County Fire Chiefs and to educate myself on the matter further, I also sat down with our County Assessor, and fire district board members. Lake County is over 8,000 square miles in size and our Fire Departments are almost entirely volunteer.

There is a process already in place to form and create a fire district that is voter driven, land owners save money with a district levy over higher insurance rates... but only when additional apparatus can be purchased, stationed, and infrastructure such as water lines and hydrants can be afforded and installed. This is determined by individual measures passed locally, and the promises of the individual Fire Districts, who are held accountable by the voters.

1. The ISO rating for a land owners fire insurance is not affected by simply drawing a circle around a fire district. If it is affected at all, you might achieve getting the rating from a 10 to a 9, but it won't justify the additional tax, and doesn't increase the fire safety to homes and business owners, as the ISO rating is still entirely based around boots on the ground, infrastructure and apparatus availability.

Lake County has 4 rural fire districts, all seem to be working well with the guide lines already in place. Those districts are also in existence because it is what the land owners and voters decided. They had a choice in the matter, and I believe every tax payer deserves the right to that choice and to know what services they will be receiving and/or need.

2. The process for annexation of land into a taxing district without an appropriate public process does not work for Counties. It is said that this bill is an "Opt-In", but that is not the case. As I read the Amendment, if a rural fire district chooses to opt in, properties would be required to be annexed. It would merely be the job of the Board of Commissioners to facilitate making it happen, regardless of public comment or opposition.

Not one of our Fire Chiefs I brought this to thought it was a good idea, and all felt that annexation into a rural fire district should be a local decision made by the voters.

In closing,

- SB 605 ignores the will of the voters and denies them a voice on a tax increase.
- It does not provide additional infrastructure for fighting wildland fire.
- This bill turns the board of Commissioners into a rubber stamp committee to implement the will of a rural fire district.

I truly believe that SB 605 would further alienate home owners to governmental agencies, and although I understand the premise of SB-605, rather than painting with a broad brush over our state. I would ask for a broader perspective of mutual respect and understanding for our rural neighbors.

I respectfully ask and hope that SB 605 will not be passed out of committee as written, and that amendments addressing our concerns, outlined by myself and AOC staff are adopted. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Commissioner/Chair James Williams