

February 9, 2021

Senate Committee on Energy and Environment
Senator Lee Beyer, Chair
Senator Lynn Findley, Vice-Chair
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Senate Bill 286 – in Support

Note: I was scheduled to testify on 2/9/21 but the committee ran out of time and I am unavailable to testify on 2/11/21 and therefore am submitting this written testimony.

Dear Chair Beyer, Vice-Chair Findley, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jim Kreider and I live in La Grande, Oregon -- the NE section of our beautiful state. I am also a member of the Environmental Justice Task Force (EJTF). I am here today to encourage you to support SB 286.

I wish to talk with you about three things: 1) the importance of the diversity of the task forces members; 2) the need to have an Environmental Justice lens on everything the state does; and, 3) adequate resources to do the job.

During my term on the task force the importance of having diversity in the members representing the geographic, economic, cultural, historical, business, and recreational interests of all people in the state is not only essential, but growing. Bringing rural perspectives to the table and mixing them with the attributes just mentioned has allowed the task force, in my opinion, to make better recommendations to state agencies and the governor. Feedback from state agencies regarding suggestions that the EJTF has provided has been positive. We have been fortunate to have been able to assemble the great diversity that we have in the EJTF. But rural Eastern Oregon has a sub-set of common and different challenges than southern rural Oregon. Therefore, I ask that the committee consider the mix and cross section that committee members come from giving rural Oregon a designated position or positions on the new Environmental Justice Council.

With a Council membership that represents the unique and diverse population of the state it is important that all state agencies that serve these unique and diverse populations--and communities--have a connection to the Environmental Justice Council. The staff of the natural resource agencies that work with the Environmental Justice Task Force (EJTF) have been able to brief us on issues that could have adversely impacted communities. From these briefings come thoughtful discussions that try to involve all of us in problem solving and planning how to engage the communities that might be impacted from an agency's decision. We have established listening sessions the day before our meetings, which move around the state, to inform ourselves of issues a local community maybe be facing. As the old adage goes, "If you are not at the table, you're on the menu." We do not want that to happen to any community or state agency – we want to see everyone at the table, and I believe that you do too.

This is why I am also asking this committee to consider having all state agencies work with the Environmental Justice Council (EJC). If we want to practice inclusion we can't just work with a sub-set of state agencies in the natural resource arena, we need everyone on board if we want to change or grow our organizational culture so that no matter what decision an agency might be contemplating an EJ filter will be at the starting point.

My last ask is for adequate resources to do the work. We are an all volunteer Task Force with limited assistance from the governor's natural resources staff. We began our own strategic planning over a year ago but without a budget and unable to write grants, our planning stalled. But we are still working on it - pushing the ball forward slowly. Our 4 strategic goals are: 1) Coordinate a statewide assessment: Engage environmental justice community members and partners to conduct a statewide assessment; 2) Legislative change: such as this bill SB 286; 3) Community-centered advocacy: Provide a platform and pathway for EJ organizations and community to influence and inform policy; 4) Ensure accountability: Create a framework that builds in accountability for both the Governor's office as well as EJTF.

This bill changing the name from Environmental Justice Task Force to the Environmental Justice Council, moving it to the Department of Environmental Quality, and providing staffing and a budget, will allow our state to realize its Environmental Justice goals.

Thank you for your time, and again, I encourage you to support SB 286.

Thank You
/s/ Jim Kreider
La Grande, OR 97850