



Locally Grown
and
GROWING STRONG

Senate Committee on Natural Resources
OFB Testimony in Opposition to SB 605

February 10, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to SB 605. By way of background, the Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) is the state's largest agricultural trade association, representing nearly 7,000 farm and ranch families in the state, many of whom live and work in and out of areas served by rural fire protection districts.

Whether it is through their careers, volunteer opportunities, or responsibilities as rural landowners, Oregon's farmers and ranchers frequently interact with wildfire on the landscape. Rural Oregonians were severely impacted by the unprecedented wildfires that occurred over Labor Day weekend. Many OFB members were on the front lines in their communities, evacuating and caring for their employees, neighbors, animals, and friends who were in danger. Those who lost homes across the state were largely members of the agricultural community, including over a hundred agricultural employees whose homes were decimated by the Almeda Fire. In sum, Oregon's farmers and ranchers fully recognize the need for effective solutions to wildfire suppression, including the desire to streamline rural fire protection from those tasked with protecting our communities.

With this in mind, we have concerns with SB 605 as written, because forces improved properties to be annexed into a fire protection district if those properties fall within a certain distance of a fire station. On principle, OFB does not support forced annexation and would encourage proponents to amend the bill to be permissive, rather than a mandate. Landowners should not be required to join a protection district without any say as to whether they want to be served by the district or pay for the services.

For these reasons we oppose SB 605 as written and would like to engage in greater discussions about other possible solutions to this problem. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today and please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

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