

To: House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Management
RE: HB 2927
February 11th, 2021

Dear Chairman Evans,

Over the past 15 years I have had many opportunities to work closely with OEM staff from a myriad of perspectives and across multiple programs and activities. I have served as an exercise evaluator tasked with evaluating the ECC's response during the Cascadia Rising 2016 Exercise, have volunteered in support of multiple planning and response projects, and have delivered over fifty CERT Courses across the State. I have attended every OregonPrepared workshop hosted by OEM to date, three times as an invited presenter.

In 2020 I worked extensively in the ECC. From March through May I responded through DHS in support of ESF (Mass Care) and ESF 11 (Food and Feeding) during the first three months of the State's COVID-19 Disaster Response. I was back again for 2 weeks in September for the Oregon Wildfire Response as the Task Force Lead for a support team from Team Rubicon, USA. Our team filled many spots in the organizational structure of ECC Operations from the Planning Section to on-site Logistics, to Operational Coordination. I was personally assigned as a Deputy Coordination Section Chief managing a team of government liaisons who were assisting multiple counties effected by the fires with producing their response and recovery requests in OEM's OpsCenter.

No matter what the task has been over the years, upon its conclusion I have consistently been left with two lingering impressions. First, that this is a group of extremely dedicated, competent, and forward-thinking individuals who care deeply about the impact they and their actions have on our great state. Second, the only hurdles that stand in the way of fully actionizing their well thought out and practiced plans are simply budgetary constraints and a lack of self-directed authority.

Clearly stated, they are severely understaffed and underfunded. Many employees are covering tasks under a single position that are consistently covered by two or three employees in other state emergency management systems. The fact that they have to request assistance from other state emergency managers in order to keep our own operating at full capacity during critical operations is not something that any of us should be proud of. This is NOT about them not being competent enough to handle the work. This is about being pushed to the limits of physical and mental endurance due to a lack of sufficient staffing resources to maintain the pace that a large and extended disaster response requires.

Add to that the challenges imposed by the lack of self-direction and autonomy that comes with being housed under an extraneous layer of authority. This strains preparation, response and continuity of recovery activities by creating additional layers of communications and subjective opinions and direction from others who are not always fully versed in the nuances and necessities of Emergency Management. Bluntly put – the circular and conflicting politics currently in place are killing our state's response agencies, and it's time to put a stop to it.

As an Oregonian who fully understands the risks our state faces and the tasks and responsibilities held by the Office of Emergency Management, **I urge you to continue fighting for the success of HB 2927** in order to provide them with the full measure of fiscal support and directional authority that their mission deserves as a Department of the State. Our very lives depend upon it.

Sincerely,

Kimberly A. Townsend

Kimberly Townsend
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