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Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery OFB Testimony in Support of Senate Bills 405 & 465

February 24, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 405 and SB 465. 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 have been severely impacted by both the regulatory consequences of COVID-19 and the devastating Labor Day wildfires. First, OFB wants to make clear that we support the intent of both SB 405 and SB 465. However, we believe that SB 405 actually subsumes SB 465, as it encompasses both the COVID-19 concern and the wildfire concern of SB 465. With this in mind, our testimony focuses on the effects of SB 405, since it is the broader bill, but we are supportive of both efforts.

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.

Moreover, COVID-19 related market disruptions have hit farmers and ranchers particularly hard. Prior to COVID-19, producers were already under tremendous pressure – net income on farms is half of what it was five years ago, trade disruptions have forced new and established markets to collapse, and long-time processor, NORPAC, recently closed. Market prices are at record lows across many commodities, and farmers are grappling with significant and recent regulatory costs. At the same time, no one was prepared to respond to changing market pressures overnight and the impact this pandemic would have Oregon's iconic agritourism festivals and direct marketing opportunities.

OFB is supportive of SB 405 because will provide needed protection for Oregon's landowners and business owners who need support now more than ever. SB 405 provides that when determining whether a non-conforming use has been interrupted or abandoned, the period of time that a federal, state, or local emergency order limits or prohibits the use from occurring, or prohibits

the replacement or repair of the existing use is not counted. SB 405 also allows a property owner who lost a home or other structure in the Labor Day wildfires to re-establish that use, notwithstanding the one-year time period for replacement or repair of the dwelling. This carefully crafted solution will allow for lawful uses to continue after the pandemic ends, despite being temporarily halted, and will allow property owners to rebuild without having to worry about unreasonable deadlines.

For these reasons, OFB supports both SB 405 and SB 465, and urges the Committee to vote YES on these bills.

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