

February 24, 2021

Dear Chair Golden and members of the committee,

The wildfire of September 2020 produced some of the worst destruction in my community I have seen in my lifetime. People lost their homes, their businesses, and in some cases their lives. The rebuilding of these homes and communities is particularly challenging due to the vastness of the destruction and the continued complications and slowdowns with COVID19 restrictions. Our systems and our government have been disrupted and things are delayed and complicated. The restrictions that vulnerable populations are operating under during COVID19 have made some of the steps necessary in the cleanup and rebuilding of properties nearly impossible to achieve. This has been an extraordinary year and requires special considerations and accommodation from our government with regulations and deadlines.

This is a straightforward bill that simply allows for flexibility and extended timelines for Oregonians to rebuild their losses. Current law requires restoration or replacement to be commenced within one year from the occurrence of the fire, casualty, or natural disaster. Senate Bill 465 would require counties until September 30, 2025 to allow commencement of restoration or replacement of nonconforming uses that were damaged or destroyed by the September 2020 wildfires. It was crafted after my office received emails from people in Oregon struggling with next steps and the amount of time it was all taking. I appreciate Senator Girod and Representative Drazan for bringing this bill forward.

The displacement of Oregonians and the disruption to our systems is continuing. For example, I am struggling to get this testimony to the committee and am unable to testify in person due to ten days of power loss, and current loss of internet connectivity at my home, which is where I and many others are doing our jobs. I can manage to get a letter to the committee, but don't have a strong enough and stable Wi-Fi connection at the moment to join a remote meeting. I can't go to a coffee shop and log in there due to COVID restrictions for my county. Many of my neighbors and friends are also without power or internet so that isn't option, even if levels of comfort would allow personal visits. I bring this up to highlight the very real challenges of many Oregonians. My situation will resolve in the next few days, hopefully, but many Oregonians displaced by fires are challenged continually by these issues.

I urge your support of this bill. Let's give Oregonians the tools to rebuild their lives and their communities after a year of unprecedented destruction and difficulty. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Denyc Boles
Marion County