

Dear Oregon legislature,

On September 8, 2020, our lives were irrevocably changed when we had to flee the fire. My children and I ran through our burning mobile home park, not knowing what to do, or where to go. We didn't have transportation that day and as we ran around, our neighbors' homes were already catching on fire. It was terrifying.

The worse fire nightmares are the ones where I know I'm dreaming about it, but I can't wake up. There's fire all around me and that roaring sound that I can't flee from. They go on and on and I see things I didn't want to ever see the first time. The trees fall. Utility poles come down. Everything is melting around me, disappearing before my eyes and I can't stop it, no matter how much I want to. When I finally open my eyes I'm wiped out from exhaustion and fear.

I am fire phobic.

In my new normal, there are several different things I do now that help reduce the likelihood of having dreams that I remember, but they aren't foolproof. Those dreams still find their way in sometimes. In my new normal it is rare for me to get more than 4-5 hours of sleep each night. My mental health has taken a beating from this.

My family is extremely lucky. After the fire, friends and our extensive community wide network, helped us find temporary housing and we stayed in a rental house for 10 months. Before the fire we had experienced several family losses and those deaths had provided some inheritance money. Without that in place, my family would likely still be living in temporary housing today. Instead, we wiped out our savings and the little bit of retirement we had and combined that with insurance and FEMA money. We were able to purchase a home back in the same mobile home park. A home that was remodeled and cost \$125,000. Our original home was \$18,000. If all of those pieces hadn't lined up just right, we would not have landed so softly.

And yet, this is "lucky".

Our lives have changed so much. Gone are our dreams of traveling. It's too dangerous to leave our home and pets unsupervised, even if we could manage to afford it. We are both trying to work as much as we possibly can and no longer can afford to do much volunteering in our community. We have to rebuild our savings. We can't afford to buy glasses or a needed hearing aid and those items are not covered through OHP. Often, between PTSD and our struggles with maintaining good mental health, it has proven to be extremely challenging to work. Personally I've bounced from job to job, and before the fire I never experienced struggles like that. I can't do what I am trained to do, because I am unable to juggle the needs of other traumatized people.

Our park has 10 homes back in (out of 70) and 6 of those are finished and ready to live in. About 1/3 of our neighbors can't afford to move back home. Of our neighbors we've seen them struggle with health issues triggered by the stress brought on by the fire. One neighbor died of a heart attack and she was approximately 60 years old. Other neighbors have since divorced. Families have broken up.

My children are thankfully doing well. We watched our youngest daughter struggle in school last year, going from being a honor roll student to flunking several classes. She's back to getting straight A's again. Landing back in the park into permanent housing (whatever that means). We live knowing what an

illusion that is), allowed our kids to settle back into their lives. I worry about the youngest in particular. At 16, her childhood ended on September 8, 2020. Her older sister, our middle child is an RCC student. She is using art to try and heal.

We lost hundreds, maybe thousands of pets in the valley on September 8. We lost three human lives. We were very lucky that we didn't lose more people. I know the families who lost loved ones understand the double edged sword of that "lucky".

We're seeing mobile homes selling for 3x to 5x their value. Many times they're being flipped after being remodeled. This is one more example of how our housing market in the Rogue Valley is out of control. 40 year old mobile homes are selling for \$90,000 to \$99,000. Remember our old home was \$18,000 and we purchased it almost exactly 4 years to the day, before the fire. This is an out of control market.

I want to end this on a positive note. Our mobile home park owner, Mike Skinner has worked tirelessly, trying to get our neighbors back home. I've watched him work 6-7 days a week since the fire. He worked nonstop cleaning up the park. He's prepared each spot. He's helping homeowners with their landing pads and driveways. Mike and his wife Vicky, are community heroes. So many of the parks are owned by out of state corporations. Bear Creek mobile home park is locally owned and the owners have been here rebuilding with all of their might.

Thanks for listening.

Vanessa Houk

Bear Creek mobile home park, Ashland.