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Greetings Chair Nathanson and Members of the House Committee on Revenue,

It is an honor to testify today on behalf of the students, staff, families and communities served by the McKenzie School District in support of HB 4026.

When initially preparing my notes, I went straight for the numbers but as the hypotheticals were swirling in my head I kept finding myself coming back to a message our school community has been mindful to share with our students, staff and families this year. That is the message of gratitude.

So instead of reciting financial loss figures and hypothetical scenarios, I'd prefer to use my time here to convey the gratitude of our community to you as members of the Legislature. In many instances, the previous session provided the needed support for our fire affected communities. Including grants supporting tax losses, funding for the removal of hazardous debris, the replacement of needed services such as water, sanitation and fire protection and to special targeted support of local agencies including our library and clinic. Responding to the Wildfires of 2020 was an enormous task in so many areas and you stepped up and provided resources and support to do so. Looking back on last year's session there was one item of recovery support left undone, HB 2630. Although that bill did not get passed, we are grateful for the immediate and continued support from the legislature and the people of Oregon. The support that was mustered has provided a great deal of relief to those recovering from the fires as well as the agencies that support those who remain.

We are grateful for our district's role in our community's recovery efforts. We opened our spaces to agencies providing a Relief Center where survivors could get food, clothing, and internet access. We hosted the temporary Blue River Post Office as well as State and County aid workers. We continue to support the work of many recovery and rebuilding efforts through the participation of staff members. With little local government in our area our district is playing an outsized role in supporting our community's health and rebirth. We are grateful that our campus was spared and is able to serve our students and our broader community as well.

I'd also like to express our gratitude for the support of Representatives Marsh, Gomberg, Cate, Hayden and Senators Anderson, Courtney, Girod and Golden for taking up HB 4026 which would finish the work started yet left undone by HB 2630. HB 4026 provides funding for schools with enrollment losses due to the events of Labor Day 2020 tied to pre-fire enrollment levels. This will have an immediate impact as our districts were directed to budget last spring as though HB 2630 funding would be available. One quarter of our students and one third of our staff lost their homes. Unable to find a new place to call home, over 20% of our students were unable to return. This will translate to a reduction of our state school funds which will in turn become not only a loss of staff but also a reduction in our capacity to serve our students and greater community in recovery. We are grateful for your support in preventing the dual tragedy of fire compounded by students losing trusted teachers and staff as well as our dedicated staff losing jobs.

In short, McKenzie School District is grateful for the time provided by HB 4026 for our community to take stock of the progress we are making in recovery and craft a thoughtful plan in response to meet the needs of our students.

Thank you for your time and service to our great state,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "N. Lane Tompkins".

N. Lane Tompkins
Superintendent
McKenzie School District