



Philomath Fire & Rescue

1035 Main Street
P.O. Box 247
Philomath, OR 97370
541.360.0030

Committee Chair Golden, Vice Chair Kennemer, and committee members, I am providing written testimony in support of SB 1582.

Under current laws and statutes, a property owner can choose not to be in a Rural Fire Protection District. Property owners do not have a choice on educational taxes, city or county taxes, or public safety law enforcement taxes, yet they can choose if they support essential public safety fire and emergency services. For the many reasons outlined here, and more, these rules need to be updated and aligned with other taxing entity regulations in an effort to stabilize District funding and operational logistics because these dollars are vital to support the fire and emergency service infrastructure available to protect and support the area.

Logistically, having property owners within the fire district boundaries but not incorporated into the district overly complicates emergency response to these areas. You may have a group of houses or subdivision where three or four are incorporated into the district and the other two or three are not. How do you distinguish if someone is in or out during an emergency? Minutes count and lives are at stake. Yes, it would be nice to simply say we just don't respond to those people, but who wants to take the liability if a wrong address was given, or no address is given and just an area. How is this equitable taxation when one property owner is in the fire district and their neighbor is not? Districts have a fiduciary obligation to tax paying members to ensure their safety. How can we do this fairly? In addition, the mental health impact to emergency first responders who knowingly do not or cannot respond, in an already emotionally taxing environment can have significant long-standing impacts.

Given that most Rural Fire Protection Districts cover Wildland-Urban Interface lands, the issues and inequities are magnified. You have properties that have not supported the infrastructure, yet they get the same response through conflagration as any tax-paying member. The tax dollars from covered properties are used to improve the infrastructure in an entire area, through equipment,



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personnel, and training that mitigates the fire risk for individual property owners, their neighbors, and the community at large. We often hear that property owners would rather be billed for services once needed, but a key feature of fire service is prevention through community planning, mitigation, and training. These are costs that are incurred before an emergency happens. It should be everyone's responsibility to support the infrastructure of emergency services.

In addition to fire protection most Rural Fire Protection Districts provide medical first response and, given that they are usually rural by nature, the ambulance response times can be quite lengthy. If the District boundaries were closed, and all property owners supported their Rural Fire Protection District by being tax-paying members of the district, this supports emergency responders responding to provide life-saving medical treatment while waiting for an ambulance.

I respectfully ask that you support SB 1582 and pass it out of committee and support it on the chamber floor. We should all support our emergency responders who are on the front line of fire, medical, and disaster response, to ensure that everyone has access to and is supporting the infrastructure that saves property and lives.

Most earnestly,

Benton County

Fire Defense Board Chief Tom Miller