

Submitter: Jasmine Zimmer-Stucky
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Revenue
Measure: HB4097

February 9, 2022

Representative Nancy Nathanson, Chair
Representative Khanh Pham, Vice-Chair
Representative E. Werner Reschke, Vice-Chair
House Committee on Revenue

RE: Volunteer firefighter in support of HB4097 for a safer and more resilient Oregon

Dear Chair Nathanson, Vice-Chairs Pham and Reschke, and Members of the Committee

I am a volunteer firefighter with Corbett Fire District #14 in Multnomah County. I write to you as a citizen, and I do not speak on behalf of my department.

The Corbett Fire District stretches east from the Sandy River to Multnomah Falls and south from the Columbia River to Clackamas County. Approximately 4,000 people reside in the Corbett Fire District. Due to the proximity to urban centers, ample recreation opportunities at parks, rivers, and trails, and Interstate 84 and the Union Pacific Railroad, the Corbett Fire District – like all volunteer fire departments – serves the extended Oregon community.

I am often asked what volunteer firefighters do. To quickly get the questioner up to speed, I reply, “if you call 911 anywhere between the Sandy River and Multnomah Falls for a fire, car accident, or medical emergency, I will be there to help you.” The next question they ask is usually about when I am “on duty”. I respond from my home – stopping whatever I am doing – to drive to the fire station where a crew of other people who also dropped whatever they were doing when the alarm on their pager sounded is assembling. Together, we drive to the scene in the fire engine. I have left dinner half-cooked on the stove, abandoned house guests, sprinted from my blueberry field, and woken up in the dead of night to respond to 911 calls.

I joined the fire department four years ago when I realized that the quality of emergency fire and medical response available in my community depends on the generosity and dedication of community members volunteering with the fire department. While working full-time, I completed a yearlong firefighter training program and trained as an EMT.

My training prepared me for fire, medical, and other emergency scenes. However, training did not prepare me for the people I would work with. I volunteer with incredible people. Like me, they trade sleep and time with family to help those in need. More than a handful of the members of Corbett Fire have served as volunteer firefighters for more years than I have been alive – I am 35. Their experience is an enormous asset to the fire department and all those served by it. I am grateful for the opportunity to volunteer alongside such committed people. While these experienced volunteer firefighters are critical, they cannot be the future of the volunteer fire service. People in my age group and younger are the future of volunteer firefighting.

Being a volunteer firefighter adds up financially and HB4097 will help make this volunteer job more sustainable. It will cover the expenses I incur as a result of volunteering -- like when I broke my cell phone responding to an emergency or purchased winter tires to drive safely to my responding station.

I believe that Oregonians need emergency responders now more than ever, and that the chaotic weather conditions causing bigger wildfires, harsher snowstorms, summer heat domes, and other climate disasters will only add to the demand. Volunteer firefighters are an incredibly cost-effective way for the state of Oregon to ensure it has the staffing needed to effectively respond to the growing emergencies that we face. By supporting HB4097, Oregon can strengthen its volunteer fire departments and become a more resilient state.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this legislation. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Jasmine Zimmer-Stucky