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STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 20



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 10, 2022

Representative Nancy Nathanson
Chair, House Committee on Revenue
81st Legislative Assembly
Oregon House of Representatives
Oregon State Capitol

Ref: HB 4097

Chair Nathanson, Honorable Colleagues:

Please accept this letter of support for House Bill 4097 (HB 4097). This bill hits close to my heart because of my own experience as a volunteer firefighter. My uncle, father, cousin, and my cousin's two sons all served as volunteer firefighters as well. In rural areas like my hometown, volunteers were necessary if we had any hope of ambulance service or fire extinguishment. Even though our community has grown, we still have a relatively small full-time force supplemented by a robust volunteer firefighter membership. Neither could provide the same level of service absent the other: we have a genuine team approach.

Providing tax credits for volunteer firefighters is a long, long overdue policy. Nearly 80% of our current emergency services/fire community is comprised of volunteers. Currently, the fire service is stressed to meet even full-time/paid staffing requirements.

Fire districts with historically robust volunteer membership are also struggling. And emergent training requirements combined with significantly increased calls for service have reshaped the volunteer experience. In many places around Oregon, serving as a volunteer firefighter is nearly a full-time unpaid job – it is becoming a real struggle for even lifers to keep up.

Tax credits will not solve the problems of maintaining a robust emergency services/fire pipeline. Tax credits will not dramatically incentivize people who have never thought about serving as firefighters to consider it. But tax credits could help a lot of our community heroes have a little extra money to pay their bills, take a vacation, or help a child go to school. This measure is both instrument and ornament: it recognizes the importance of our volunteer firefighters at an affordable price while taking a first step in stabilizing the volunteer fire community.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter.

Respectfully,

Oregon House of Representatives
Former Volunteer Firefighter (1989-1992, 1997-2001)