



February 22, 2022
House Committee on Revenue

OFCA in Support of SB 1582

Chair Nathanson, Vice-Chairs Reschke and Pham, members of the House Committee on Revenue.

On behalf of the Oregon Fire Chiefs Association, thank you for the opportunity to share our support for SB 1582. In the wake of Oregon's two most devastating fire seasons in our State's history, the Legislature has made great strides in modernizing how we prevent and fight fire. This bill is another good step in that direction.

Fire does not respect jurisdictional or political boundaries. It starts and spreads where it is able, which is why the Oregon Fire Chiefs Association has long advocated for having a basic level of fire protection for all lands in Oregon. SB 1582 advances that goal by providing critical support and clarity for our Rural Fire Protection Districts (RFPDs).

RFPDs play a critical role in our coordinated efforts to respond to and contain wildfires. The status quo hinders their ability to expand their boundaries to encompass lands they'll ultimately be responsible for protecting. Additionally, the public process outlined in SB 1582 would provide equity for residents who pay taxes to support the community emergency services infrastructure.

Fire engines can cost over \$700,000 to buy, fire stations now cost in the millions to build and the cost to train and equip a career or volunteer firefighters is significant. Providing these resources for an hourly rate is not fair to those who shoulder a much higher burden and receive the same service.

Some would advocate for not responding to emergencies if they are out of the fire district. This is not a practical solution as people will call 911 when they see smoke in an area, hear an explosion, or the sound of a car crash. This requires a response to investigate. If firefighters discover a fire, they are compelled to act immediately, or other lives and homes will be threatened. Failing to act is not an option for our first responders regardless of boundaries or the financial structure of their department. This legislation would help provide the resources needed for our RFPDs to fulfil their duty and protect rural communities.

In conclusion, SB 1582 is a practical solution for our first responders and communities at risk of wildfire. On behalf of the Oregon Fire Chiefs Association, we urge your support.

Sincerely,

Chief Robert Horton
Legislative Committee Chair, OFCA