

Paul L Evans
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
DISTRICT 20



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 3, 2022

Representative Dacia Grayber
Chair, Committee on Veterans and Emergency Management
Oregon House of Representatives
Oregon Capitol Building
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Ref: HB 4068

Chair Grayber:

As the committee considers HB 4068 (the HVEM Omnibus Bill), I request we focus upon the three major components: adjustments requested by the Governor, improvement to our response/recovery functions for future disasters, and statutory clarity on matters associated with our recent statewide COVID-19/wildfire response/recovery.

Recent conversations have continued the dialogue on the mechanics of adjustments requested by the Governor. I support adding the Governor or a designee to members of both the Oregon Homeland Security Council (OHSC) and the Emergency Preparedness Advisory Council (EPAC) while maintaining the “staffing function” for each inside the new Oregon Department of Emergency Management. Both duties can be performed with existing staffing and do not require increased FTE. The other two components of adjustments: moving the “Oregon Pre-Disaster Mitigation Fund” to OEM and establishing a baseline expectation of FTE required for 24 hour-365-day staffing of the Emergency Operations Center should remain in the language of the bill to constrain any future misunderstanding of intent. Language could be drafted outlining a baseline expectation of 24 hour-365-day operational staffing instead of FTE could be an option – but either way, the Joint Committee on Ways & Means will understand.

Improving our ability to respond/recover from a disaster is at the core of HB 4068. Accordingly, I strongly support the new training requirements (that can be accomplished without any additional cost), aspirational training requirements that can be used for future funding requests, and implementation of a statewide stockpiling program outside the agencies relied upon previously reflect both good planning as well as lessons learned from the past three years. While greater flexibility in form and function may be required in the future, it is critical we move this concept forward – while people still remember the mistakes of our early COVID-19 response. Outgoing Emergency Recovery Director Matthew Garrett concurs with the value of interagency exercise – even at the tabletop level – and lists this need near the top of his recommendations for action. Please know despite the expressed concerns of a few regarding the training, stockpile, and exercises – these investments are sound policy. Ongoing advocacy within leadership and the Joint Ways & Means process will secure at least a portion of the larger vision in this legislative session if forwarded on. There is a recognition of the challenges – and there will not be a better time for putting the framework into place.

Finally, the amendment associated with clarity for interagency action as previously intended by the Special House Committee on Wildfire and the House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Management about targeted assistance funding after the catastrophic wildfires of 2020 and 2021 warrants direct action. Statutory clarity should not be needed, but after an investigation into this matter, I know that it is – and will be. Thank you for consideration of these comments.

Respectfully,

Oregon House of Representatives
District 20