



**To: Members of the Joint Interim Special Committee on Wildfire Funding**

**From: Chief Nick Tyler**  
Sweet Home Fire and Ambulance District  
Oregon Fire Chiefs Association & SDAO Fire Districts

**Chief Mike Cook**  
Chiloquin Fire and Rescue  
Oregon Fire Chiefs Association & SDAO Fire Districts

**Date: December 11, 2024**

**Re: SB 5801 - Support for the funding request for OSFM and ODF**

Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez and Members of the committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Fire Chiefs Association and SDAO Fire Districts, we want to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 5801.

Fire agencies across the State of Oregon rely on one another to handle the wildfires that we see today. There is not a fire agency in the State that can handle the fires that we are seeing on the landscape every year. Thankfully, through a shared mission, strong leadership, and confidence in legislative support, Oregon has developed a robust mutual aid system. When the State calls for help, agencies from across Oregon step up. We do this through our symbiotic relationship with the Office of the State Fire Marshal. We have built a solid, foundational trust. When they call, we do everything we can to support the mission. In return, they ensure that our men and women, volunteer and career, are reimbursed for their time and our local tax payers are reimbursed for the use of the apparatus that their local tax dollars purchased.

Thankfully, our local elected officials are often supportive of this system. They recognize the importance of helping others, because as we've seen before, in any year, any community can end up being the one requesting the help. They also recognize that their local community has invested in their local resources. Through not only permanent taxes, but through operational levies and general obligation bonds, local taxpayers have invested in their resources and it is vital that their elected boards can reassure the community who has funded it that they will be made whole.

Years ago, it was a unique learning privilege to deploy on a wildfire. Today, local fire agencies are part of Oregon's complete and coordinated system - responding to conflagrations is expected by our firefighters and our state and federal partners. With wildfire acreage increasing dramatically over the last five decades and infiltration into the wildland urban interface, our firefighters are being deployed more frequently and for longer periods. Personnel are redeploying from one fire to another or before they unpack at home. With the ongoing support they receive from the communities they arrive in, their local agencies, and the State of Oregon, they continue to be willing to work through these increasingly difficult fire seasons. However, this still taxes our community's resources, causes our firefighters at home to work extra shifts, and strains local agencies by drawing down fiscal resources until reimbursed by OSFM. But for the majority of Oregon fire agencies, their staffing is insufficient to support the increasing demands of the fire season. Statewide, the collective fleet of fire apparatus has been inadequate in terms of distribution and availability.

Fortunately, funding through the upstaffing grants, the immediate response structure, and the engine program have provided critical funds to ensure that our state-wide mutual aid system matures from a reactionary force to a proactive system through thoughtful investment. Without funds to upstaff agencies across the State, the firefighting force to respond to fires the past three years simply would not have been there. We would almost certainly have had to rely on far more costly out of state resources to work within our borders. Additionally, OSFM grants have provided for prepositioning crews be in priority areas in the hours prior to high-threat conditions and for immediate response to high-potential fires that exceed local capacity. These programs help keep fires small and help reduce the number of declared conflagrations. The impact of a crew being within a few miles of a fire start rather than several counties away is obvious and evident in the statistics of their efficacy - helping reduce the number of declared conflagrations, loss of timber, wheat, structures, lives, and other values-at-risk. Lastly, the engine program has enabled jurisdictions from across the State to be able to respond to everything from mega-fires to smaller fires that happen within their jurisdictions.

The SDAO Fire Districts and the Oregon Fire Chiefs Association are in favor of ensuring OSFM and ODF have the cash flow needed to ensure prompt payment of firefighting resources. This will ensure that the public and private resources that we, as Oregonians, rely on to protect our landscape will continue to be available when we need them. We are in favor of the LFO recommendation and support LC 2 Wildfire Appropriation Bill.

We further support ongoing reinvestment in mitigation and response in wildfire in the next legislative session. We encourage the legislature to approve an early session bill to fund the OSFM with \$6 million for local agency upstaffing for the 2025 fire season. This is critical to ensure that local agencies can hire additional staff in time for the fire season. This investment would maintain the base level of statewide capability.

Thank you for your support of OSFM, ODF, and Oregon's local fire services. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Fire Chief Mike Cook, Chiloquin Fire & Rescue  
Fire Chief Nick Tyler, Sweet Home Fire District