

Date: March 22, 2023

To: House Committee on Climate, Energy and Environment

Re: Support for H.B. 2990 Community Resilience Hubs

Dear Chair Marsh, Co-Chairs, and Members of the House Committee on Climate, Energy, and Environment,

My name is Christina Kukuk, and I live in Ashland, Oregon, and I am writing today as a pastor of a local church personally impacted by the Almeda Fire in September 2020. I support HB 2990 to create a grant program through the Office of Resilience and Emergency Management that will go directly to communities to build and implement Community Resilience Hubs and networks.

I support such hubs because of my personal experience:

On Tuesday, Sept. 9, 2020, I was a pastor working from home when I saw out my window the smoke behind Almeda Drive begin to rise. My two children were also schooling from home that day due to the pandemic. We were all separated from my spouse who was working in a neighboring school district due to the path of the fire, evacuation routes, and natural geography.

The fire cut people off from one another – physically and relationally.

My small staff and church leaders scrambled that day and the days that followed to reach members we knew lived in the path of the fire, especially to care for elders, the disabled, and others we knew to be particularly vulnerable. Not everyone could reach emergency services at the Expo.

Two of our church member households lost their homes and everything in them that day. Another 12-15 were evacuated from their homes for varying periods of time up to several weeks. These included two of my staff who evacuated their own multi-generational households.

We opened our church for people to use the electricity to recharge communication devices, take a shower, do remote work or school, find a reprieve from the toxic smoke that lasted for many more weeks after the fire, or just connect with another human in the wake of shock and trauma.

Our care team also attempted to connect those in need of temporary housing with those who had temporary housing available so that fire-impacted individuals could at least know and trust those they were suddenly forced to depend on for shelter and other necessities.

We functioned as a community resilience hub – but without the communication and other infrastructure needed to tap into a wider network for greater strength and sustainability. One mass evacuation site was insufficient in that disaster, our emergency services were overwhelmed, and yet we as a church community knew we were imperfectly suited to fill the gaps.

Faith communities already know we are stronger together. When our communities are threatened by wildfires, extreme heat, and other disasters like the COVID-19 pandemic, we look out for our neighbors.

I want us all to be better prepared next time. Our ability to heal and move forward together after natural disaster depends on strengthening our bonds and fostering trusting relationships in local communities *before* the disaster strikes.

I urge you to vote Yes on HB 2990 so churches like ours, communities like ours, have what they need – a trusted, accessible, local network of support for all Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Rev. Christina G. Kukuk

Ashland, Oregon

Former Senior Minister, Ashland Congregational United Church of Christ

Current Member, Medford, OR, United Church of Christ