

March 30, 2023

The Honorable Michael Dembrow and Khanh Pham
Co-Chairs, Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Oregon State Legislature
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Senator Dembrow, Representative Pham, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to advocate that the State recognize and prioritize funding for wildfire-related work throughout Oregon, as wildfires continue to be a growing issue as Oregon's climate dries and warms. The Governor's proposed budget does not continue wildfire-related work initiated by the \$220 million of funding under the 2021 bipartisan Senate Bill 762. This support is necessary so communities can become fire-adapted, develop safe and effective response plans, and increase the resiliency of Oregon's landscapes.

I ask this committee to include two items in DEQ's Legislatively Adopted Budget which are absent from Governor Kotek's Recommended Budget.

I request the inclusion of Policy Option Package (POP) 116 and Community Biennium Funds for Particulate Matter (PM Funds) in the legislatively adopted budget. While these items do not compensate for a lack of continued funding provided by 2021's Senate Bill 762, both items are critical for safeguarding Oregon's air quality and defending public health. As the Mayor of Oakridge, I have seen firsthand the important role the PM Funds play in protecting the health and well-being of our communities and the great need wildfire smoke management POP 116 aims to support.

POP 116 increases DEQ's budget by \$250,000 per biennium to support the Lane Regional Air Protection Agency (LRAPA)'s General Fund. LRAPA is the local government responsible for regulating air quality under the Clean Air Act in Lane County.

In 2022, Oakridge experienced 37 days of air quality that was considered unhealthy to breathe on the Air Quality Index (AQI) due to smoke from the Cedar Creek wildfire. LRAPA played a critical role in protecting public health during this emergency by directly communicating air quality forecasts to the community. LRAPA also highlighted rare opportunities of improved air quality so residents might open their doors and windows to refresh polluted indoor air. LRAPA was vital in informing residents of opportunities to receive state-provided air purifiers (purchased with funding from 2021's SB 762) to protect their indoor air quality and health.

As wildfires become more frequent in Oregon, it is crucial that entities like LRAPA receive funding to collaborate and respond to air quality emergencies caused by wildfires. Therefore, I urge members of this committee to recognize the growing impact of wildfire smoke on Oregon's communities and support LRAPA by including POP 116 in the legislatively adopted budget.

I am also advocating for the inclusion of PM Funds, which are absent from the Governor's Recommended Budget, in the legislatively adopted budget. The program provides approximately \$86,000 annually to rural communities in Oregon to reduce air pollution from wood stoves and yard debris burning. For over 20 years, rural communities across Oregon that struggle to meet federal health-based standards for Particulate Matter have benefited from DEQ aid to implement local air quality programs. This approach is extremely effective because it allows programs to be tailored to best suit their community's needs. The EPA is taking action to lower Particulate Matter health-based standards. Without this supportive funding, rural communities in Oregon are in greater jeopardy of violating standards and facing economic consequences for doing so. Therefore, I urge this committee to ensure the Community Biennium Funds for Particulate Matter are included in the legislatively adopted budget.

In conclusion, I strongly encourage this Subcommittee on Natural Resources Joint Committee on Ways and Means – as well as the entire Legislative Assembly – to carefully consider the consequences of not continuing the work initiated by 2021's SB 762. I request that this subcommittee support POP 116 and the restoration of Community Biennium Funds for Particulate Matter to DEQ's budget. Both items are critical to protecting the

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health and well-being of Oregon's rural communities, particularly during periods of poor air quality due to wildfires and wintertime wood burning. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Bryan Cutchen

Mayor of Oakridge