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April 4, 2023

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Chair Ken Helm,
Vice-Chair Mark Owens,
Vice-Chair Annessa Hartman,
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 3124, the Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security Package

Dear Chair Helm, Vice-Chair Owens, Vice-Chair Hartman, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of [District] to express strong support for House Bill 3124, the Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security Package proposed by Representative Helm and Representative Owens. I particularly want to highlight the importance of provisions that provide match funding for irrigation districts to unlock federal dollars for irrigation modernization projects and help districts like ours be more resilient to drought and water scarcity.

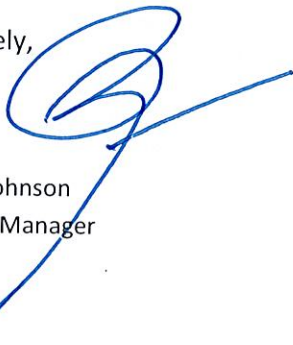
Arnold Irrigation District (AID) is in Central Oregon providing irrigation water to over 600 farms on 4,384 acres. Crops grown include a mix of forage grasses, alfalfa, and more recently lavender and triticale, a drought tolerant forage in addition to beef, lamb, goat and alpaca animal operations. AID has been in operation since 1905 and most of the infrastructure that the district relies on is over 100 years old and basically consists of open earth ditches running through fractured basalt lava. Our infrastructure is very inefficient with system seepage losses of 45% and increasingly expensive to annually operate and maintain. The main canal modernization project that the district is pursuing will provide 32.5 cfs of permanently conserved water that lower Deschutes River diversion amounts by 35% and increases the irrigation water supply to junior irrigation districts and permanently increase instream flows in the Upper Deschutes for enhanced flows and habitat for listed as Threatened Endangered Species Act species and more reliable water deliveries to patrons.

Oregon has faced several years of severe droughts, including some of the worst on record, and the detrimental impacts are being felt throughout the state, including in our region. Without access to reliable water deliveries, farmers are unable to grow crops and produce the food and fiber that we all rely on. This not only affects our economy, but also our food security and, especially in rural communities, our way of life. AID has had to turn off irrigation water to its patrons at the end of July for three straight years and many patrons have had significantly reduced crop yields necessitating reduction of animal operations as it is very unprofitable to replace lost feed crops by purchasing replacement feed on the market carrying historically high prices. AID has also experienced many farms now being sold or on the market further reducing agriculture production and food for the area.

In order to implement large-scale, multi-benefit projects to modernize irrigation infrastructure and be more resilient to drought, many districts, including ours, have utilized federal programs such as NRCS's Watershed & Flood Prevention Operations or Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART for support. These programs play a key role in planning, designing, and implementing projects, but still require some portion of project funding to come from non-federal sources. Our district is committed to modernizing our system, but we require state funding to meet match requirements for implementing identified projects in 2023-2025 and beyond. Bill 3124 contains the match funding districts need to fully utilize and leverage the infrastructure dollars that the federal government has made available.

I urge you to support the important funding components in HB 3124 and ensure that state match funding for irrigation modernization projects remains a part of the final bill. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'S' followed by a horizontal line that extends to the right and then curves downwards.

Steve Johnson
District Manager