

To: Chair Helm; Vice-Chair Hartman, Vice-Chair Owens; Members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources & Water

From: Tracy Rainey, Clean Water Services

Date: April 3, 2023

RE: Support for Reuse Funding in HB 3124 – Bipartisan Drought Assistance & Water Security Package

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

Clean Water Services is a water resource management utility that provides wastewater, stormwater and water resource recovery services to more than 600,000 residents and businesses in urban Washington County.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of passage of a comprehensive drought package this session. We are so appreciative of the work of the co-chairs, Representative Helm and Representative Owens, and especially their staff to engage with stakeholders and experts across the state on this vital investment. While we are supportive of many of the funding components within this package, **we want to speak specifically to funding that will specifically help communities in efforts to further promote and expand water reuse projects across the state.**

A resilient water supply is absolutely critical for the protection/enhancement of our environment and natural resources, for our economy, economic development, public health and as a necessary component of supporting necessary housing production. Across the nation, we are seeing a shifting perspective that places value in the clean water that we provide – valuing that water as a commodity instead of a waste. In our basin and across the state, we have seen (and we expect to continue to see) shifts in irrigation timing and demand due to drought, shifts in cropping patterns, and warmer temperatures. The clean water that our utilities provide can serve as a consistent and dependable water supply resource to help mitigate these impacts.

In addition, reliable water supply is critical in order for us to comply with the water quality standards specified through our National Pollutant Discharge Elimination (NPDES) permit. Drought conditions often further exasperate water quality challenges, especially for temperature which is a regulated pollutant that can be particularly difficult for Oregon water utilities to address as part of NPDES permits.

Our utility discharges treated water to the Tualatin River which is a relatively small and slower moving waterbody. As a result, we are subject to stringent water quality standards and therefore provide an incredibly high level of treatment prior to returning water to the river. We are very proud of this work and our role in protecting the health and vitality of the river and its tributaries. For nearly 50 years we

have utilized stored water from Hagg Lake to provide critical flows to the river during summer months. These stored water releases are a necessary component of our water quality compliance strategy. However, with warming temperatures, we know that we will need to deploy additional tools to ensure continued protection of the river. Reuse is one of the most critical tools we can invest in and can provide numerous additional benefits. Water reuse projects can provide a reliable water resource for irrigation needs while also providing additional enhanced benefits including ecological uplift, offsetting the need for water withdrawals, avoided costs associated with using drinking water for irrigation, supporting increasing water demands, and serving as a tool to promote resiliency, including for drought.

In order for communities to be successful and to provide the treatment and benefits that our society expects, we need the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality to be positioned to provide us with a regulatory pathway that can promote these projects while still protecting public health and environment.

The funding included in the Bipartisan Drought Assistance & Water Security Package provides important resources to DEQ that will help utilities, like Clean Water Services, in our efforts to maximize water reuse opportunities. It will also ensure that DEQ has the staff needed to update the existing regulatory frameworks and to improve agency coordination, and will provide needed technical assistance to communities that may be looking to engage in reuse opportunities but that don't have the necessary capacity to be successful.

Thank you again for your consideration and work to bring this package forward.