



February 5, 2024

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 4148 – Wildlife Package

Dear Chair Helm and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water:

On behalf of the Oregon Wildlife Rehabilitation Association, we respectfully submit the following comments in support of HB 4148. This bill takes important steps to advance coexistence and address the threat of zoonotic disease – both of which are of great importance to the wildlife rehabilitation community. OWRA is a volunteer-run nonprofit organization which supports wildlife rehabilitation and licensed rehabilitators across the state. OWRA connects members from all Oregon wildlife rehabilitation centers and independent wildlife rehabilitators across the state to share knowledge and promote collaboration.

OWRA supports HB 4148 in its entirety, but we are especially interested in the proposal to establish a Wildlife Coexistence Program within the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), which includes a grant program for licensed wildlife rehabilitation centers. Wildlife rehabilitation centers are key partners in the state's efforts to advance coexistence – especially as population growth and habitat loss increases the potential for conflicts between people and wildlife. OWRA's member organizations serve to educate and engage the public about local wildlife through programming and promote cooperative solutions to wildlife conflict. Large centers can field dozens of calls from the public each day involving specific wildlife conflicts or injured wildlife patients needing care. Wildlife rehabilitators currently provide this important public service without any government funding.

We are also encouraged to see that the proposed Wildlife Coexistence Program would fund five new wildlife coexistence biologists, one coexistence campaign coordinator, and a coexistence/living with wildlife campaign. We would welcome the opportunity to be partners as this effort unfolds and believe that HB 4148 represents a critical investment in ODFW's efforts to advance the principles of coexistence across the state.

OWRA is also interested in the provisions of the bill to address wildlife disease. Specifically, we request that OWRA and our member organizations be part of the ongoing conversation to improve the state's zoonotic disease response and prevention framework. As direct stewards of the state's wildlife, wildlife rehabilitators are on the frontline of recognizing disease outbreaks and educating the public about zoonotic and other agriculturally important diseases. As zoonotic diseases become more common, the

role of wildlife rehabilitators will become more important as wildlife is a known reservoir for emerging diseases that may impact public health.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and strongly urge you to support HB 4148.

Oregon Wildlife Rehabilitation Association
OWRA.Board@gmail.com

Members of the Board:

Sarah Spangler, President
Pauline Hice, Vice President
Claire Peterson, DVM, Wildlife Veterinarian and OWRA Secretary
Naoko Aketa, Member
Ginger Nealon, Member