

**FIRE ADMINISTRATION**

1212 SW Simpson Avenue
Bend, OR 97702

PHONE

(541) 322-6300
Relay Users Dial 7-1-1

AMBULANCE BILLING

(541) 385-6682

FAX

(541) 322-6321

WEB

bendoregon.gov/fire

MAYOR

Melanie Kebler

MAYOR PRO TEM

Megan Perkins

CITY COUNCILORS

Ariel Méndez
Gina Franzosa
Megan Norris
Mike Riley
Steve Platt

CITY MANAGER

Eric King

FIRE CHIEF

Todd Riley

House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97701

RE: Support for HB 3243

Chair Nosse and members of the Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

Testimony in Support of HB 3243
February 24, 2025

On behalf of the Bend Fire & Rescue (BF&R), I strongly urge the passage of HB 3243, which would protect patients from balance billing and ensure that ground emergency transport agencies, like BF&R, are reimbursed fairly to preserve services to our communities.

Bend Fire & Rescue: Navigating Challenges While Remaining Committed to Service

The Bend Fire & Rescue (BF&R) was established in 1905. Over the years, the department has evolved into a dynamic all-hazards organization, seamlessly integrating career firefighters and dedicated staff. With 106 skilled career personnel, BF&R operates six stations, covering a 164-square-mile fire protection area serving approximately 120,000 residents. In addition to the fire protection area BF&R oversees a 1450-square-mile ambulance service area that provides emergency medical care to people across the City of Bend, the Rural Fire Protection District #2 and many rural parts of Deschutes County.

Despite BF&R's dedication to the community, financial and operational challenges persist. Like many fire departments across Oregon, BF&R faces a widening gap between revenue and expenses, making it increasingly difficult to maintain services at current levels.

Establishing Local Reimbursement Rates

The BF&R, like many EMS providers, does not receive adequate reimbursement to cover the cost associated with providing essential ambulance services to our community. The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) delegates the responsibility to each individual county to establish Ambulance Service Areas (ASA). In our case, it is Deschutes County who provides the authority to the BF&R to provide services to portions of Deschutes County. Ambulance

services are funded, as outlined under ORS 682, as a service-based fee. Those using the service pay for the service and is not subsidized with taxpayer ad valorem property taxes.

BF&R establishes our local ambulance rates through a public process and are based on the cost of providing care to our local area. This public process, requiring council adoption, is to cover the actual costs and, per city policy, does not allow for the department to create fees to generate a profit. HB 3243 will protect our patients against balance billing and as well as their access to critical emergency resources by ensuring that the prescribed reimbursement rates are appropriate and sufficient.

Commitment to the Community

Despite these challenges, Bend Fire & Rescue remains unwavering in its commitment to serving the community. Firefighters, paramedics, and volunteers continue to work tirelessly to provide high-quality emergency response and ensure public safety. While financial constraints present obstacles, BF&R is actively pursuing solutions, including advocating for legislative changes, seeking grant opportunities, and exploring operational efficiencies to maintain critical services. Bend Fire & Rescue takes immense pride in protecting the lives and property of those it serves. Amidst upcoming challenges, BF&R will strive to answer the call, keeping the safety of the community as its highest priority.

HB 3243 represents a long-overdue investment in ground emergency transport response to all Oregonians. On behalf of the Bend Fire & Rescue (BF&R), I strongly urge the passage of HB 3243, which would protect patients from balance billing and secure essential funding for ground emergency transport agencies, like the BF&R, to preserve services to our communities.



Drew Norris
Deputy Chief EMS – Bend Fire & Rescue