



Jefferson County Fire & EMS
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Testimony of Support for House Bill 3243 “Balanced Billing”

On behalf of the Jefferson County Fire & EMS District in Madras, OR I strongly urge the passage of HB 3243, which would protect patients from balance billing and ensure that ground emergency transport agencies, like JC Fire & EMS are reimbursed fairly to preserve emergency medical services to our communities. Passage of this bill must include letting fire and EMS district’s like mine set their rates.

Jefferson County Fire & EMS: Navigating Challenges While Remaining Committed to Service

Jefferson County Fire & EMS is located in Jefferson County and has been a cornerstone of public safety. The two districts merged a couple of years ago and have evolved into a dynamic all-hazards organization, integrating career firefighters and dedicated volunteers. JC Fire & EMS operate two stations, one staffed full-time and one supported by volunteers only. The district covers a 200-square-mile fire protection area serving 15,000 residents and oversees a 1100-square-mile ambulance service area that provides emergency medical care to 30,000 people across Madras, Metolius, Culver and unincorporated areas of Jefferson and SE Wasco County.

Despite our dedication to the community, financial and operational challenges persist. Like many special districts across Oregon, JC Fire & EMS faces a widening gap between revenue and expenses, making it increasingly difficult to maintain services at current levels, while call volumes continue to rise. Rural EMS services have been forgotten during the fight against houselessness, the fentanyl/ opioid crisis and the post COVID inflationary issues. Fire based EMS services like mine have not received any additional revenue from programs designed to assist in these areas.

Jefferson County is one of the most economically challenged counties in the State of Oregon. In April of 2025 JC Fire & EMS will be forced to lay off four full-time positions.

Establishing Local Reimbursement Rates

JC Fire & EMS, like many EMS providers, does not receive adequate reimbursement to cover the cost associated with providing essential ambulance services for 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 Jefferson County, who provides the authority to the JC Fire & EMS to provide services to portions of Jefferson County. Ambulance services are funded, as outlined under ORS 682, as a

service-based fee. Those using the service pay for the service and are not subsidized with taxpayer ad valorem property taxes. The ASA does not pay for the standby or preparation cost for the EMS services.

JC Fire & EMS 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 board adoption, is to cover the actual costs and per board policy does not allow for the district to create fees to generate a profit.

HB 3243 will protect our patients against balance billing and includes protecting their access to critical emergency resources – by ensuring that the prescribed reimbursement rates are appropriate and sufficient.

Commitment to the Community

Despite these challenges, Jefferson County Fire & EMS 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, JC Fire & EMS is actively pursuing solutions, including advocating for legislative changes, seeking grant opportunities, and exploring operational efficiencies to maintain critical services.

HB 3243 represents a long-overdue investment in ground emergency transport response to all Oregonians. On behalf of Jefferson County Fire & EMS, I strongly urge the passage of HB 3243, which would protect patients from balanced billing and secure essential funding for ground emergency transport agencies.

Emergency medical services in rural areas are facing a crisis, if we do not receive help from our state legislature, the crisis will continue, and ambulance deserts will develop in rural Oregon. Please act now!



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