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On Behalf Of: Lane County  
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB837

As one of the newer Medical Reserve Corps in the state, Lane County Public Health Reserve Corps (PHRC) supports the passage of SB 837. This bill would allow MRCs like ours to be able to respond to emergencies and disasters more readily and easily. During COVID, the need for both medical and non-medical, vetted volunteers ready to deploy became life-saving necessity. SB 837 would allow for non-medical volunteers to register with SERV-OR and be covered during emergencies. It would make it easier for the state and local MRCs to provide mutual aid across jurisdictions and outside of the state.

Sourcing liability coverage is one of the most challenging aspects for MRCs, so any expansion of that will support the functions of MRCs. With SB 837, non-medical volunteers would have liability coverage during state sanctioned exercises allowing local MRCs to hold more impactful exercises for the multitude of hazards Oregonians face. The bill would also allow for standardization of MRCs across the state, which would make it easier for new MRCs to undertake the arduous process of getting a new program launched.

During the Ice Storm in January, 2024, the PHRC had to deploy volunteers using county liability processes while it was a local activation, and then re-deploy the same volunteers through the state process once a governor declaration came down. This complicated deployment and caused extra work for PHRC staff who also had responsibilities in the county EOC and reduced our ability to respond quickly and with agility. SB 837 is a much-needed improvement for MRC ease of deployment by allowing OHA to deploy volunteers outside of a governor declaration.