

**Testimony to the House Committee on Rules
On HB 3525**

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance equitable, innovative and collaborative solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council supports HB3525 -A10, because all Oregonians deserve clean, safe drinking water.

While renters in areas served by water delivery utilities have the protections offered under the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, renters in homes served by domestic wells are not protected from the impacts of contaminated drinking water. (Domestic wells are defined as wells that serve fewer than four connections or fewer than ten people.) HB 3525 -A10 requires landlords to test domestic wells for arsenic, total coliform, nitrates and lead. The landlord must share those test results with their tenants within 30 days of receiving the test results.

70% of Oregonians get some portion of their water from groundwater, and approximately 23% of Oregonians use domestic wells as their primary source of drinking water. (Domestic wells are defined as wells that serve fewer than four connections or fewer than ten people.) Unfortunately, domestic well water can be contaminated by bacteria, nitrates, arsenic and other minerals like lead and mercury. These contaminants can cause serious health problems such as cancer, miscarriage and thyroid disorders. Pregnant women and small children are particularly at risk from nitrate exposure, especially infants because their digestive and enzyme systems are not fully developed. Infants can suffer from "Blue Baby Syndrome" which decreases the ability of blood to carry oxygen and can be fatal. Statewide, Oregon has a fairly common problem with nitrate, arsenic and bacterial contamination of well water.

The number of tenant-occupied properties where the source of water is a domestic well is not insignificant. Rental properties with domestic wells are most often rural residences, and their occupants may be low-income or members of otherwise marginalized groups. They may lack access to healthcare due to income or distance to healthcare facilities. Property owners can make their own choices about whether their well water is safe to drink, installing filtration or buying bottled water if their wells are contaminated. But under existing law, renters can go many years without knowing the status of their water. HB 3525 seeks to address this problem, and ensure that landlords meet their legal mandate to provide safe drinking water to their renters.

OEC has been working since 2019 to get renters reliant on domestic wells the protection they deserve. While OEC supports this bill, including the -A10 amendments, we continue to disagree with the decision to place geographic limitations on the scope of the bill. Limiting drinking water protections for renters reliant on domestic wells to designated Groundwater Management Areas leaves the rest of Oregon's renters without the information that is essential to protecting their health and the health of their families. It sends the message to renters across the state that safeguarding their health is not a priority for Oregon, and to landlords across the state that they need not be transparent with their renters about the safety of the drinking water they are providing to those renters.

Nonetheless, we urge you to support 3525-A10. This is a first step towards the goal of having safe, clean and plentiful drinking water for rural renters across Oregon.