



February 3, 2026

Senator Kate Lieber, Cochair
Representative Tawna Sanchez, Cochair
The Joint Committee on Ways and Means

RE: Proposed budget reductions to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality

Cochair Lieber, Cochair Sanchez, and members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means:

We are the Union representing employees at the Department of Environmental Quality. We are opposed to the proposed budget reduction options delivered to the committee by the Department of Environmental Quality.

Starting from the year 2000, and continuing for nearly 20 years, the legislature enacted continued cuts to DEQ staff limiting its ability to meet its obligations under both state and federal law. In the last few bienniums the agency has added positions but in some cases we still struggle to carry out the work we are tasked with. New DEQ positions most often come with important new program work like earthquake preparedness, addressing harmful algal blooms in recreational waters and increased air monitoring associated with wildfires. It is important to remember that the basic building blocks of our communities are clean water, air and land. We all must start with these in order to thrive.

Our Union recognizes that there will likely remain a significant projected State revenue shortfall. We are also going through challenging times at the federal level where we have seen Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regional staffing dramatically reduced. Those cuts make it harder to ensure compliance with all relevant State and Federal requirements that the public is counting on us to uphold.

On behalf of the members of our Union, I urge you to consider the following when making reduction option decisions for DEQ:

1. The DEQ Laboratory applies science and advanced technology to produce the long term data needed to protect our communities and drive the agency's policy work. Cutting funding and reducing the collection of this important data has both short term and long term consequences that must be considered before cutting programs that help keep our communities advised and informed.

2. Delayed hiring of new or open positions leads to increased frustration and lower morale for those currently working at DEQ. Staff experience this as increased pressure from management to do more with less. This leads directly to burnout which exacerbates ongoing retention problems. In addition, the churn connected with poor retention reduces competencies that are developed over time. This reduces the continuity of our operations within the communities we serve.

3. Defunding any permit writing or permit support positions would be counter to recent legislative interest in improving permit application turnaround time. Given the number of bills introduced during this session related to DEQ permitting we strongly urge you to consider the impact of the proposed reduction options on permitting programs within DEQ.

Now more than ever there is a greater need for adequate staffing and funding at the State level to care for our air, land and water. Federal budget cuts along with the current federal deregulatory chaos means that our State must seriously consider stepping up to fill the gaps. At the very least we shouldn't be considering cuts to both valuable long term and new cutting-edge programs. Balancing Oregon's budget solely on the backs of working families by cutting critical services is simply wrong. Working families here in Oregon are counting on you to make a different choice.

Thank you for your continued leadership and attention to this important and evolving issue.

Eric Feeley
President
AFSCME Local 3336