

Submitter: Austin Sumpter

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and  
Wildfire

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1541

My name is Austin Sumpter. I live in the outskirts of Canby in Clackamas County, Oregon, specifically in Senate District 26 and House District 51. I come today to testify my strong support for Senate Bill 1541, the proposed Climate Superfund Bill for the state of Oregon. Over five years ago, I and many other Oregonians were forced to bear witness to the climate crisis-driven disaster that was the 2020 Labor Day Wildfires. I remember those horrible days as vividly as I do today. The strong winds. The thick, pungent smoky skies that blanketed us for days. And, of course, the eerie orange skies that would last all day and go on well into the night. We had to have sprinklers running 24/7 to soak up the ground near our house. I spent one night of that ordeal sleeping in my mom's car. Another night I spent in a tent in a peer of my sister's in their backyard—the latter was me having to evacuate my household. And the whole time, my family and I were fearing for the future of our house. We feared it would get consumed by an incoming blaze, reduced to ash and burnt materials. While my worst fears didn't come true—our house turned out to not be in the path of the flames—I remain traumatized from the experience. Not to mention I know many Oregonians, from the Santiam Canyon to the Oregon Coast to the Rogue Valley and beyond were not as fortunate. This crisis was not some random chance event. This was the inevitable outcome of decades of fossil fuel combustion. Major out-of-state companies like ExxonMobil, Chevron, and others knew decades before most of us that continuous fossil fuel combustion would contribute to the climate crisis that's unfolding now in Oregon and the rest of the world. For them, it was never a question of "will these cause problems?" but a question of "when will these cause problems?" And, like true corporate scumbags, they put short-term profits ahead of our planet's long term health. The consequences of their products are unfolding across Oregon: drier conditions, smoky summer skies, wildfire outbreaks decimating communities and habitats, and people being left to foot the bill for damages. Meanwhile, fossil fuel companies continue to rake in record profits and gain special treatment in the federal government—especially nowadays. For the sake of both climate action and consumer protections, as well as reducing future tragedies, we have a remarkable solution in Senate Bill 1541. Modeled after Vermont's first-in-the-nation Climate Superfund, this bill would have out-of-state fossil fuel companies—and only those companies—take responsibility for the damages of their products. The money would be used explicitly for projects like wildfire mitigation, climate resilience programs, environmental justice programs, and other meaningful repairs for the damages these companies have made. Oregonians are becoming keen on the idea. Make Polluters Pay events in the cities of Portland and Medford are hallmarks of growing trends in public opinion that fossil fuel companies must be held liable for the

damages of their products. Yes, it's true that Vermont and New York are now being sued by the federal government over the laws they passed. But that is not an excuse to let this bill die; that's a reason to push harder for its passage. We have increasingly limited time to act on climate to prevent the worst of its damages. Oregon is often a role model state with its legislation. Let's be a role model and hold fossil fuel corporations accountable for their climate damages. Please vote yes on this bill and help reduce future tragedies.