

Testimony in Support of House Bill 4121

Chair, Vice Chairs, and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Kassy Stone. I am here today in strong support of House Bill 4121.

I come to this testimony from both a professional and research perspective. I am a graduate social work student, and my academic and applied work focuses on disaster response, emergency preparedness, and the impacts of emergencies on marginalized and institutionalized populations. Through this work, I have reviewed emergency plans, disaster policies, and response outcomes across multiple systems, including county jails, juvenile facilities, and community-based settings.

What I consistently observe is not a lack of effort, but a lack of coordination.

Oregon's current emergency preparedness system is fragmented and unevenly implemented. Disaster mitigation planning, emergency response coordination, and community resilience efforts are often housed in separate systems that plan, train, and respond in isolation. When emergencies occur, these silos translate into delayed responses, unclear authority, duplicated efforts, and gaps in care.

Those gaps do not affect all communities equally.

Data from recent disasters in Oregon and nationally show that marginalized and underserved communities experience disproportionate harm during emergencies. This includes low-income households, people with disabilities, rural residents, incarcerated individuals, communities of color, elders, and people with limited English proficiency. These populations are often underrepresented in planning, last to receive resources, and least likely to have their specific needs anticipated.

House Bill 4121 directly addresses these structural weaknesses. Rather than creating another standalone program, it intentionally ties together the work of Oregon's existing emergency laws and programs. This alignment is critical. Disasters do not respect agency boundaries, and effective response requires shared planning, joint training, and coordinated mitigation strategies before emergencies occur.

This bill strengthens disaster preparation by encouraging collaboration across agencies and systems, improving consistency in planning, and supporting coordinated training. It moves Oregon toward a preparedness model that is proactive rather than reactive.

Equally important, House Bill 4121 advances equity and justice in emergency planning and response. It elevates the inclusion of marginalized and underserved communities as

stakeholders in planning, mitigation, and resource-sharing decisions. Equity in emergency management means recognizing that equal treatment does not result in equal outcomes, and that preparedness must account for different risks, capacities, and historical exclusions.

In my professional and academic work, I see the consequences of disconnected emergency systems during crises, particularly for people who are already vulnerable before a disaster occurs. I also see how coordination and inclusive planning dramatically improve outcomes.

House Bill 4121 does not attempt to solve every problem, but it builds the connective tissue Oregon's emergency preparedness system has been missing. It strengthens collaboration, centers equity, and improves our collective ability to respond effectively and justly.

For these reasons, I urge you to support House Bill 4121.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to the safety and well-being of all Oregonians.

Kassy Stone

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