



February 10, 2026

Testimony opposing House Bill 4046

Chair Lively, Vice Chair Gamba, Vice Chair Levy, and members of the House Committee on Climate, Energy and Environment:

I write on behalf of Beyond Toxics, a statewide environmental justice organization, to oppose HB 4046. While we appreciate the improvements made with the -2 amendment, we fear HB 4046's study will significantly overstate the benefits of nuclear energy while failing to meaningfully examine the public health, environmental justice, and long-term radioactive waste storage risks. HB 4046 is not climate action. It is an industry funded study that opens the door to nuclear development, diverting focus from proven sustainable energy solutions and putting frontline communities at future risk.

Industry Influence and Conflict of Interest

This study bill creates a framework in which the nuclear industry and corporate beneficiaries, including technology companies seeking to expand data center infrastructure, may shape the analysis. A study funded or influenced by entities that stand to profit from nuclear deployment cannot provide an independent evaluation of risk. Public health policy must be driven by independent scientific review, not industry-baked projections of economic opportunity.

Water use, Thermal Pollution, and Contamination Risk

Nuclear reactors require extremely large volumes of water for cooling. Even so-called "advanced" or "small" reactors rely heavily on water for heat dissipation¹. There are several key impacts that are insufficiently addressed in this bill:

- Massive water withdrawals will be required where these reactors are sited. This is particularly concerning during drought and climate-driven water shortages.
- These water withdrawals contribute to thermal pollution, which harms fish species, including salmon, that are already under environmental stressors.
- The cooling of the reactors heats up the water, which through the process of evaporation, concentrates toxins in the water, like nitrates which has a compounded risk when co-located with other high water-use facilities (like data centers)
- In the event of a cooling failure or reactor malfunction, radioactive contamination of a major watershed like the Columbia River would have major downstream consequences, impacting aquaculture, agriculture, and drinking water.
- Even low-probability events carry unacceptable consequences when the exposure pathway includes entire river systems and population centers.

¹ World Nuclear Association, 2020. *Cooling Power Plants*.

<https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/current-and-future-generation/cooling-power-plants>

Human Health Risks of Routine Operations

HB 4046's study design does not sufficiently address the cumulative human health impacts of routine nuclear plant operations, including chronic, low-level radiation exposure, tritium, a nuclear waste product which is released into air and water², and increased cancer risks, particularly in children living near nuclear facilities³. Radiation exposure risk impacts children, pregnant people, and those with pre-existing health conditions at a greater rate. Any serious study must include a comprehensive, independent public health risk assessment, not just a technological feasibility review as proposed in HB 4046.

Nuclear Waste and Long-term Storage Failure

The United States has no permanent, secure national repository for nuclear waste. The Yucca Mountain repository project in Washington has been stalled since 2012, and has known leaks in roughly a third of their tanks holding radioactive material⁴. In the absence of a federal repository, high-level radioactive waste will likely be stored onsite at privately-owned reactor facilities with little oversight. This material can remain radioactive for hundreds of thousands of years⁵, making this a critical human health and environmental problem that gets shifted to the shoulders of future generations to deal with. From a public health perspective, indefinite interim storage is not a solution, it simply defers the inherent risks for future generations to deal with the consequences.

Environmental Justice and Disproportionate Harm

The full nuclear fuel cycle disproportionately harms marginalized communities. Uranium mining in the Southwest U.S. led to the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act⁶ in 1990, which has awarded over \$2.6B to more than 41,000 people exposed to radiation through weapons testing, uranium mining, milling, and transportation who later developed cancer or other diseases caused by that exposure. The current federal government is rolling back nuclear regulations at an alarming rate⁷, leaving communities even more vulnerable if nuclear reactors become a reality in Oregon. The current study bill does not include comprehensive and cumulative impact analyses, environmental justice review process, or a robust health equity impact analysis. Without these explicit safeguards, we will continue to perpetuate environmental injustices to frontline communities.

² Environmental Protection Agency, 2026. *Radionuclide Basics: Tritium*.
<https://www.epa.gov/radiation/radionuclide-basics-tritium>

³ Kutanzi et, al 2016. Pediatric Exposures to Ionizing Radiation: Carcinogenic Considerations. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 13(11): 1057.
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5129267/>

⁴ Washington State, Office of the Attorney General, 2026. *Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Repository*.
<https://www.atg.wa.gov/yucca-mountain-nuclear-waste-repository>

⁵ Centers for Disease Control, 2024. *Radiation Emergencies*.
<https://www.cdc.gov/radiation-emergencies/hcp/isotopes/uranium-235-238.html>

⁶ Congressional Research Service, 2024. The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA): Compensation related to exposure to radiation from atomic weapons testing and uranium mining.

⁷ NPR, 2026. *The Trump administration has secretly rewritten nuclear safety rules*.
<https://www.npr.org/2026/01/28/nx-s1-5677187/nuclear-safety-rules-rewritten-trump>

Climate Framing without Full Risk Assessment

While nuclear energy is often marketed as “carbon-free”, this characterization ignores the emissions from uranium mining and processing, construction emissions, long-term waste management, decommissioning and environmental impacts. A study that emphasizes climate benefits without fully quantifying health, ecological, and long-term economic risk is incomplete. We should be investing in safe, proven methods of renewable energy that do not have the inherent risks of nuclear reactors to reach our climate goals.

A feasibility study completed by Purdue University in partnership with Duke Energy in 2023, failed to conduct an analysis of the environmental impacts of construction, operation, impacts of accidents involving radioactive materials including “severe accidents”, environmental justice screening, irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources, relationship between short-term uses and long-term productivity of the human environment. This study also identified an aquifer as a valuable natural resource but did not go into the potential cost or impacts of this aquifer (and communities that depend on it for drinking water and to support local industry) should this aquifer be contaminated as a result of nuclear development, yet they concluded that “the study found small modular reactors and advanced reactors are a viable option that warranted continued exploration” and none of their recommendations stressed weighing the long-term human or environmental risks of deploying this technology.⁸ Our fear is that a feasibility study here in Oregon will do the same.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit this comment on HB 4046 and ask the committee for a no vote on this bill. If Oregon is to revisit nuclear energy policy, I urge the Legislature to require a truly independent, health-centered and environmental-justice based analysis, not a fast, industry-funded feasibility study that minimizes catastrophic risks to human health and the environment.

Sincerely,



Jennifer L Davis
Executive Director
Beyond Toxics

⁸ Purdue University & Duke Energy, 2023. *Small Modular and Advanced Reactor Feasibility Study Interim Report*.

<https://www.purdue.edu/operations/nuclear/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2024/11/smr-feasibility-study-interim-report-compressed.pdf>