

Testimony in opposition to HB 4046

Chair Lively, Vice Chairs Gamba and Levy, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Joshua Baker, Director of the Nuclear Free Program at Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility. I respectfully urge a no vote on HB 4046, even with the proposed –2 amendment.

I appreciate the work that went into the –2 amendment. The added transparency and public input provisions are meaningful improvements. However, fundamental concerns remain.

This bill should not be viewed in isolation. During last year’s legislative session, more than a dozen pro-nuclear bills were introduced, including a similar proposal that explicitly called for studying the “advantages” of nuclear energy. While HB 4046, with the proposed –2 amendment, is less overt, it must be understood within that broader context. At the same time that renewed legislative efforts to advance nuclear energy are underway in Oregon, federal policy trends are favoring accelerated deployment alongside the weakening of environmental and public health protections. In this environment, even a seemingly neutral study can lay the groundwork for future policy changes that move Oregon toward nuclear development and the erosion of its longstanding safeguards.

The structure of the proposed study compounds these concerns. The bill makes the study contingent on outside funding, including private and federal sources. Reliance on industry-aligned or politically motivated funding streams raises serious questions about independence. Even when disclosed, research can be shaped by who pays for it through the assumptions adopted, the evidence prioritized, and the way findings are interpreted and presented. Given the long-term consequences of energy policy decisions, Oregon must avoid even the appearance of impropriety. Public decisions that will affect Oregonians for generations should not depend on funding from parties with a direct financial stake in the policy outcome.

The bill also narrowly focuses on nuclear energy rather than evaluating the full range of options available to meet Oregon’s energy needs. Studying various aspects of nuclear power is not the same as assessing which mix of energy solutions is the safest, most affordable, and most effective for meeting our climate goals. A comprehensive analysis would examine renewables, storage, grid capacity, efficiency gains, and the underlying causes of rising electricity demand, including the rapid growth of data centers. A nuclear-focused study risks steering attention toward a costly and uncertain pathway instead of assessing alternatives on equal footing.

These concerns, among others, warrant serious caution. The health, waste, financial, environmental, timeline, and security risks associated with nuclear energy and small modular reactors are already well documented. Oregonians do not need another narrowly focused study that could provide momentum for well-financed interests seeking to advance nuclear development in our state. For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to vote no on HB 4046.

Sincerely,
Joshua Baker, PhD
Nuclear Free Program Director
Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility