

Testimony in opposition to SB 1586

Chair Broadman, Vice-Chair McLane, and members of the committee,

My name is Joshua Baker, PhD, and I am Director of the Nuclear Free Program at Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility. I respectfully urge a no vote on SB 1586.

This bill legislatively converts rural reserve farmland into industrial land outside Oregon's normal land use process. That alone warrants caution. My primary concern, however, is what this site is likely to become in practice: large-scale data center infrastructure.

While the bill prohibits stand-alone data centers, it allows them as accessory uses. The bill does not establish clear limits on how much of a development could consist of data center operations. As written, a project could include substantial data center capacity while still complying with the statute.

This matters because data centers differ significantly from traditional industrial uses. They require continuous operation, sustained electricity demand, and major long-term infrastructure while providing relatively few permanent jobs per acre.

The energy consequences are directly relevant to state policy. Rapidly growing electricity demand from data centers is already being used in Oregon to justify proposals for new large-scale power generation, including efforts to introduce nuclear energy into the state. Land use decisions that enable very large new electrical loads therefore influence Oregon's long-term energy pathway.

SB 1586 also overrides a long-standing commitment to keep this land in agricultural production. Rural reserve designations provide certainty to farmers, surrounding businesses, and local governments. Reversing that commitment legislatively sets a precedent that protected land can be reopened when development pressure increases.

Oregon already has significant industrial land available within existing urban growth boundaries. Before permanently converting farmland, the state should demonstrate clear necessity. This bill does not do so.

Land use decisions of this scale should follow established planning processes and full public review. SB 1586 instead predetermines the outcome through statute.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to vote no on SB 1586.

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