



OREGON STATE SENATE
900 COURT STREET ST NE
SALEM, OREGON 97301

June 10, 2025

Secretary of the Senate

Vote Explanation: SB 454 A – Rural Fire Protection District Funding Advisory Committee

I strongly support SB 454 and thank the good Senator from District 16 for bringing this bill forward. Many of my colleagues may remember the three consecutive sessions when I brought forward a bill to address exactly this issue, finally getting it done in 2023 with SB 1068. Specifically, that bill addressed the issue that rural fire protection districts were facing due to a loophole in statute that required them to provide services to properties that weren't actually in the district, and I am still grateful to Chief Rob Bullock from Douglas County for his advocacy. However, while that was a significant help for our rural fire protection districts, it was still only solving one of the funding issues uniquely faced by these districts.

HB 2522 in 2023 created a Task Force for a comprehensive review to modernize the statute governing rural fire protection districts, ORS chapter 478. There were a number of simpler statutory changes recommended by the Task Force to do this, but its report underscored what I had been hearing from these districts for years: their revenue structure is unsustainable, and uniquely so.

In the interest of brevity, I will not go into all the peculiar barriers to resources faced by rural fire protection districts, but suffice it to say that they are struggling. And these are the same folks – many of whom are volunteers – who are the first ones to respond to the fires that are most likely to grow into the large conflagration fires that we dread every year. Last season, Central Douglas Fire and Rescue responded to a fire through their station in Umpqua. That rural fire protection district has been trying to build living quarters at the station in Umpqua for years, which would cost about \$900,000.

They identified that station because of its location, serving a large area with no other options anywhere nearby and taking a significant amount of time to get folks there when it needs to respond. Unfortunately, they just have not been able to find the resources to make it happen. That fire ended up growing into what was, for a time, the largest conflagration fire in the country. Who knows how things would have changed if they had been able to respond sooner, if they had firefighters in living quarters on-site, but we know how much every second counts in these situations.

I am advocating for the district to receive state support to build these living quarters to help ensure that this doesn't happen again. It would pay back exponential dividends in the future. Truly, every dollar – every cent – that these districts receive pays back enormous dividends, and their chiefs and boards are some of the most frugal folks I've ever met. We need to be supporting them, and I see SB 454 as a very important step in that direction.