



# OREGON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION



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## SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 5031 February 20, 2019

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### Introduction

Members of the Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Public Safety, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. For the record, my name is David Busby, I work in Benton County and reside in Linn County, and I appear before you today on behalf of the Oregon Emergency Management Association (OEMA) to provide testimony in support of House Bill 5031.

### Background

The Secretary of State of Oregon released an audit of the office of Oregon Emergency Management (OEM) in January 2018. It revealed that Oregon is unprepared to meet the challenge of responding to and recovering from a landscape-wide disaster, such as the impending Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami. As such, in her policy agenda entitled *Resiliency 2025*, released in October of last year, Governor Brown established six key strategies to improve preparedness; the fifth strategy specifically calls on OEM to strengthen local emergency management organizations, and to develop locally based incident management teams. Moreover, the current Governor’s Recommended Budget includes a 130% increase in general funds for OEM, and these funds should be brought through HB5031.

### Reasoning

The findings from the Secretary of State’s audit of emergency management could not have been more clear. Our state is unprepared for a major disaster, and it is time to take action to build a more resilient Oregon. House Bill 5031 takes an important step in that direction by providing a significant increase in General Fund support to the Oregon Office of Emergency Management. Those funds can address two significant gaps that stand in the way of resilience:

1. Lack of staff capacity at OEM, and;
2. The need to build regional emergency management incident management teams (IMTs).

### Staff capacity at OEM

OEMA is concerned that emergency management is under resourced at all levels of government in Oregon, and specifically that the Oregon Office of Emergency Management’s staff is too small to accomplish it’s mission. The Secretary of State’s audit supports this concern noting, “Current statewide staffing is inadequate to reduce Oregon’s vulnerability to disasters. OEM in particular is understaffed, despite repeated budget requests to the Legislature, which inhibits the agency’s capacity to coordinate emergency management efforts in the state.”

Recognizing this shortcoming, the Governor’s Recommended Budget (GRB) requests \$8.7M in General Funds for OEM. OEMA welcomes this recommendation as an important step in the right direction, however OEMA urges the Legislature to ensure those funds to be

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used, in part, to furnish additional full-time regular staff for the OEM. The audit further purports that, “OEM is understaffed compared to some other states.” In attempt to address this problem, the Oregon Military Department’s 2019-2021 Agency Request Budget includes a request for over 20 new positions. OMD has requested additional funding for new full time positions before, and OEMA now urges the Oregon Legislature to support HB5031, and to ensure the funds are used, in part, to hire permanent, full-time staff whose duties are to foster better coordination with and support to, local emergency management professionals, and to embolden efforts to form regional emergency management incident management teams.

## Regional Incident Management Teams:

OEMA strongly encourages OEM to have adequate staff to support regional emergency management planning, training and exercises. In contrast to the outstanding regional cooperation conducted in the Portland Metropolitan Organization (RDPO), which is funded by a federal grant available only to that region, regional planning elsewhere in Oregon lags behind. This raises serious equity issues and further aggravates the “urban-rural divide.” Another bill, HB2734, offers a blueprint for the creation of regional engagement teams to address this gap and ought to be passed by the Legislature as a companion to HB5031.

Two regions of Oregon have made significant steps toward the development of credentialed incident management teams. Success in central Oregon in Crook, Deschutes, and Jefferson Counties is showing the potential for regional emergency management teams and cooperation. Additionally, some local emergency management offices in the Mid Willamette Valley have sought funding to train a regional team. Furthermore, it stands to reason that even if the state were paying for a local Type III IMT, it would be much less expensive than an Oregon State Fire Marshal (OSFM) Office Type III IMT. OSFM IMTs can experience excessive costs due to overtime and other systemic expenses, whereas a regional team would provide similar support through mutual aid and with local knowledge and local follow-up.

However, it is important to emphasize that regional emergency management teams would not replace existing OSFM or Oregon Department of Forestry teams. Those existing teams are tremendous statewide assets, but they are not always available for needs at the local level. They also can only be in one place at a time and Cascadia will present challenges for them to meet demands of mobilization and depth. Ideally, both levels of IMT should be expanded. OEMA supports the expansion and support of regional emergency management teams, but not at the expense of ODF or OSFM.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, OEMA urges the legislature to promote the expansion of OEM staff to grow and expand cooperation between state and local emergency management officials by providing necessary funding through House Bill 5031. This would also provide a solid substrate upon which local incident management teams could be built. I thank the Members of the Joint Subcommittee for their time, and I would be happy to answer any questions.