

Submitter: Joseph Schmitz

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Housing and Development

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1522

Chair Pham and Members of the Committee,

My name is Joe Schmitz. I'm a fourth-generation logger and a first-generation forester, finishing my Master of Forestry and working at the intersection of hands-on land management and academic training. I grew up in the woods and I've spent my career working them — laying out units, managing operations, and watching, up close, what happens when we loosen our grip on the landscapes we claim to value.

I'm asking you to oppose SB 1522-1 because it cuts out one of the core guardrails that has kept Oregon from turning into every other Western state swallowed by sprawl. Under our land use system — the one that has served Oregon for over 50 years — communities have to weigh multiple factors when expanding their UGBs. They look at soils, existing uses, and the long-term tradeoffs between urban growth and protecting farm and forest lands. It's a balanced approach that recognizes we can grow, but we should grow smart.

SB 1522-1 would throw that balance out the window. By prohibiting cities from even considering soil types or current land uses when designating urban reserves, it pushes development straight onto the best agricultural and forest lands first. It tells cities to pick whatever is "easiest" to urbanize — and in Oregon, "easiest" usually means flat, well-drained, highly productive farmland and forestland. The very ground that feeds families, supports rural economies, and anchors the ecosystems that define this state.

As someone who has worked these landscapes my whole life, I've seen the long-term damage that careless expansion can do. Once prime farm and forestlands are gone, they don't come back — not in any timeframe that matters to communities, contractors, or ecosystems.

There's a reason leaders like Tom McCall fought to protect these lands in the first place. He understood that Oregon's greatness isn't just in its scenery — it's in its restraint. In the willingness to say: not everywhere should be built on, even if it's easy. That wisdom has held our cities livable, our farms working, and our forests intact.

SB 1522-1 also unravels the years of work recently completed by the Department of Land Conservation and Development and the Land Conservation and Development Commission to implement the Oregon Housing Needs Analysis. That effort brought

stakeholders together to solve housing issues thoughtfully — not by short-circuiting the process and sacrificing irreplaceable ground just because it simplifies a map.

I'm not here out of ideology; I'm here because I've walked the land, worked it, and seen what happens when we treat it as expendable. Once you lose the middle ground between cities — the farms, forests, and open spaces that define Oregon — you lose the Oregon that McCall warned us to guard fiercely.

I urge you to say no to SB 1522-1 and protect the balance that has made this state what it is.

Sincerely,  
Joe Schmitz