

Southern Oregon Climate Action Now



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Chair Jama and Members of the Senate Committee on Housing and Development

I write as co-facilitator of Southern Oregon Climate Action Now on behalf of the over 1600 rural Southern Oregonians who are SOCAN. Our mission is to promote awareness and understanding of the science of global warming and its climate change consequences and motivate individual and collective action to address the resulting climate crisis.

In a civilized society, individual behaviors and social interactions among members are guided by and constrained by rules upon which we mutually agree, or are developed by our elected representatives. Our lives are governed by rules that balance the rights that confer upon us individual freedoms, and the responsibilities that allow us to thrive in a healthy, sustainable, and successful society. Unfortunately, all too often rules are required that impose upon individuals requirements to which they object either because those individuals simply place their freedom above their responsibility to the rest of the population in the community in which they live, or because they are unaware of the cost their behavior imposes on others. It would be ideal if behaviors that benefit individuals always also benefitted the community. Regrettably, this is not the case. It is inevitable that maximizing individual profit is best achieved, for example, by releasing the toxic waste that is a by-product of one's endeavors into the air or waters of our nation rather than processing and neutralizing it. This maximizes our profits and externalizes our costs of doing business, thus imposing those costs on our neighbors.

Those wishing to impose the cost of their freedom on others all too often try to impose their will on society by developing and enacting laws that delay, compromise, or totally thwart rational and reasonable efforts to establish rules that would benefit society as a whole. These efforts, furthermore, usually arrive without the provision of any alternative mechanism(s) to address the problem that proposed rules address. Indeed, they often arrive with a simple implicit or explicit claim that the free market (even the regulated free market in which we currently live) will address the problems when it is exactly the failure of current unregulated free market behavior that lies at the root of the problem.

It is in this context that SB1537 arrives in the Senate Committee on Housing and Development. According to DEQ data, over 30% of greenhouse gas emissions result from energy use in our residential and commercial buildings. If we are to take seriously the need to rein in global warming to control the climate change consequences that are threatening our natural ecosystems, our agriculture, our forestry and imposing wildfires and drought on Oregon, we need to reduce emissions in every sector of our economy and across the state. Only when we have undertaken the best efforts available to reduce our

emissions, will we have any credibility or moral authority to urge others to do likewise. Rather than seeking ways to undermine efforts to reduce emissions, any state legislators who wish to protect the livability of our planet for future generations should be seeking ways to encourage emissions reductions.

Instead of offering any mechanisms to reduce emissions from our buildings, SB1537 simply would impose complex, nebulous, burdensome, and expensive assessment requirements on agencies. These would make any reasonable proposal that seeks to remedy the problem difficult to apply. This proposal and its ilk, furthermore, would compromise the ability of agencies, legislators, and local communities to promote climate action, energy efficiency, wildfire management, public health, and worker safety.

SB1537, additionally, arrives as a solution in search of a problem since already embedded within the requirement of agency action to address issues is the expectation that cost effectiveness be included. While we support the purported goal of protecting low-income Oregonians, this proposal seemingly flies under the hypocritical premise of protecting low-income communities when, in reality, it was crafted by and simply serves builders; there is no evidence that the development of the proposal incorporated discussions with low-income, racial justice, or land use advocates.

The SB1537 effort seems simply designed to establish an impossible bar that would prevent any of the named agencies from meeting their charge. Proponents of SB1537 seem committed to preventing legislators and agencies from protecting our environment and our population from self-centered and anti-social behaviors.

For these reasons, representing rural Oregonians who care about our collective future, SOCAN opposes SB1537 and urges its rejection by the Senate Committee on Housing and Development.

Respectfully submitted



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