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Re: Support of SB 868

Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Findley, and members of the Senate Energy and Environment Committee,

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) and Oregon Interfaith Power & Light (OIPL) offer our enthusiastic support for the package of bills included in the Resilient Efficient Policy Package: SB 868, SB 869, SB 870, and SB 871, along with the anticipated amendments referenced by Senator Lieber and Representative Marsh during the March 14 committee hearing. Additionally, we have expressed our support of the companion bill, HB 3166, which will promote the interagency collaboration that will be so important to help Oregon residents learn about and access new and existing federal and state incentives through a one-stop-shop.

EMO is comprised of 15 member denominations plus over 150 congregations and faith-based institutions across our state. We also partner with many individuals and groups from a variety of faith traditions in our climate and environmental work through Oregon Interfaith Power & Light (OIPL). OIPL encourages Oregon's faith communities to strive to care for our neighbors and the Earth, our common home, through individual and collective energy efficiency and renewable energy projects to reduce our climate impact and offer safe and healthy places for our communities to gather. For example, we have an Oregon Interfaith Solar Campaign and we partner with the national Interfaith Power & Light to offer a "Cool Congregations" program to help houses of worship with weatherization and renewable energy projects. SB 868–871 are in line with the work we are already doing and would make this type of work easier and more affordable for individuals and organizations so we can all move toward healthier, more energy efficient, and more climate friendly buildings. Therefore, EMO and OIPL are proud members of the broad coalition of groups and individuals that support this package of bills.

Regarding SB 868, we applaud this bill's focus on ensuring life-saving heating and cooling appliances and other home retrofits are available and affordable for all Oregonians. Our member congregations have helped the state distribute air conditioners and have served as warming and cooling shelters during weather emergencies, but it would be much better for everyone to have access to a livable temperature in their own dwellings. These heating and cooling appliances should help mitigate climate change, not make the problem worse, so we are in support of making the most efficient appliances affordable and available, and also making people's homes more efficient so they do not need to use as much energy — or as large a percentage of their income on utility bills. All around, this is an excellent bill to help those who need affordable energy and retrofits, aid contractors and builders in knowing about these programs, and ensure sustainable and just outcomes.

We have been following the progress of the Joint Task Force on Resilient Efficient Buildings since its inception. The four bills that emerged out of the impressive work of this task force provide an excellent first step for what will need to be a multiple step process to adequately address the building sector's contribution to the climate crisis and enhance building resiliency.

At the March 14 committee hearing, Senator Lieber and Representative Marsh did an excellent job of presenting the policy framework, the major problems each bill attempts to address, and the actual strategies and actions found in the bills to address these problems. The overwhelming support from the oral and written testimony reaffirm that they are on the right track. We appreciate that there are several amendments still to emerge; this is entirely appropriate given the complicated nature of the issues addressed and the benefits of seeking to identify common ground among multiple parties.

Climate change is the most pressing issue of our time. We know that homes and buildings are the first line of defense against climate harms, such as unprecedented heat domes and climate-fueled wildfires and smoke. We also know that homes and buildings are currently the second largest source of climate pollution in Oregon.

Faith communities located in some of the parts of Oregon most vulnerable to climate emergencies confirm what many environmental justice advocates have already told this committee: while climate-related damages impact all Oregon communities, it is the frontline communities that experience the greatest harm. Therefore, we are pleased that SB 868 Healthy Heating and Cooling for All is included in this package of bills.

The Resilient Efficient Buildings Package offers a major contribution to the vital effort to address climate change, meet our energy needs in an affordable, just, and sustainable manner, and protect public health. We encourage all members of this committee to support these bills in this committee and throughout the legislative process.