

350 Salem OR

350 Salem OR is a grassroots organization composed of everyday people taking action for a stable climate and sustainable planet.

Dear Energy and Environment Committee Members,

We are writing to urge your strong support for HB 2488, the “Equity and Climate in Land Use” bill.

The bill asks the state to update statewide land-use planning goals to ensure equitable participation of disadvantaged and historically underserved communities in land use decisions, and to establish measurable climate targets associated with land use.

Our laws about land-use planning were written half a century ago. Since that time, we have gained a greater—and often painful—awareness that many of our land-use decisions assume a sacrifice zone. These decisions are often catastrophic for poor communities and people of color. Historically, those who have assumed the greatest burdens of pollution and decreased land values are those who have been least included in decision-making bodies. They are invisible victims of laws that don’t serve them.

We have such a community in Marion County. For decades, a predominantly Latinx community has been subjected to toxic chemicals like mercury, cadmium, lead and dioxin emitted by the Covanta Marion incinerator. These chemicals cause numerous and often severe health problems, and yet more sensible, lower-cost solutions—such as utilizing a nearby landfill—were not adopted, in part, because land-use equity laws didn’t exist. (Incidentally, the Covanta Marian incinerator also emits 2.6 times as many greenhouse gases as the local Coffin Butte landfill.) When disadvantaged people are not invited to the table, structural racism and deep-rooted inequalities are upheld in our land-use laws.

Additionally, Oregon has not adopted climate mitigation criteria in its land-use policy. As our wildfires, droughts and floods demonstrate, our most vulnerable communities suffer the most impacts from climate change. HB 2488 would promote climate justice by addressing climate change adaptation and mitigation for disadvantaged communities.

This year the pandemic, wildfires and economic dislocation have laid bare the inequities across Oregon. We urge you to use this newfound awareness to build back stronger, placing equity and justice at the forefront. The “Equity and Climate in Land Use” bill would recognize and ensure that all Oregonians are represented as we plan our future.

We urge you to support HB 2488.

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