



The League of Women Voters of Oregon, established in 1920, is a grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.

January 22, 2025

To: Co-Chairs [Reps. Ken Helm](#) and [Mark Owens](#)

Members of the [House Committee](#) on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water

Re: [HB 2168](#) – Onsite Septic and Water Well Loan Programs – **Continued Support**

The League of Women Voters of Oregon continues to support these programs to provide low-interest loans for on-site septic repairs, replacements and upgrades as well as continues to support the water well abandonment, repair and replacement fund as we have since the inception of each program. This may be the 10-year anniversary of the onsite septic program and the well program was created in 2021. As a result of these programs, they have done exactly what the legislature wanted—helped Oregonians address serious public health issues while staying in their homes. Additionally, the state’s investment was increased by outside donations to the third-party administrator for the Department of Environmental Quality’s onsite septic program, allowing the state’s investment to be stretched to serve even more Oregonians around the state.

We support this bill because the League has multiple positions related to water quantity and quality: *“The League opposes degradation of all of Oregon’s surface and groundwater.” “The League supports policies and legislation that integrate water quality into resource management and include but are not limited to standards for:Potable water and drinking water.....Placement and inspection of septic tanks and alternative individual treatment systems,Permitting and enforcement procedures with agency funding adequate to ensure timely compliance,Support should be provided for upgrading and maintaining the equipment necessary...”*

Our testimony regarding the need for onsite septic repair or replacement in previous years included stories from Tenmile Lake on the coast to the McKenzie River area in the Willamette Valley to La Pine in Central Oregon. We understand that loans have been provided in 29 of Oregon’s 36 counties. In the past few years, we have heard of dry water wells in the Klamath and other Central and Eastern Oregon locations, as well as in other areas of the state.

DEQ is responsible for administering the Clean Water Act. Water well construction is the responsibility of the Water Resources Dept. and the Oregon Health Authority has responsibility for assuring clean drinking water to Oregonians. We know that most Oregonians get their drinking water from groundwater. According to DEQ, 70% of Oregonians, including over 90% of rural residents, rely on groundwater as their primary or secondary drinking water source. In 2013 there were an estimated 200,000 to 350,000 individual home domestic wells that supply drinking water to Oregonians. We know that number has increased. Many of those same

Oregonians also rely on septic systems. Testimony provided by a septic system provider in 2011 stated that approximately 30% of all single-family homes have on-site septic systems.

We urge your **Support** for HB 2168 to continue these important programs to address public health issues while assisting low-income households around the state by **allocating at least \$5 million to the onsite septic loan program and \$5 million to the water well fund**. If appropriating money to the Oregon State Extension Service to do outreach and provide assistance to households is helpful, we can support that funding as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.



Lisa Bentson
President LWVOR



Peggy Lynch
Natural Resources Coordinator

Cc: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Co-Chairs [Sen. Kate Lieber](#) and [Rep. Tawna Sanchez](#)
Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources Co-Chairs
[Sen. Lew Frederick](#) and [Rep. Emerson Levy](#)