

# THE COMMUNIQUE

## Spring 2026

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Publication Of The  
**OREGON FIRE DISTRICT  
DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION**  
EDUCATION-COORDINATION-LEGISLATION

# THE COMMUNIQUE

A Publication of the  
Oregon Fire District  
Directors Association

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## MISSION

To serve and strengthen through the provision and coordination of timely information, education, and legislation.

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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Joe Morneau  
OFDDA President

## Thank You for Another Successful Conference

On behalf of the Board of Directors of OFDDA and myself, thank you to each of you who attended the 2025 Fire Service Conference in Seaside, helping to make it a huge success. Based on your feedback, I'm confident that the program delivered the necessary training, networking, and camaraderie we've all come to expect and appreciate from these events.

The 2025 Conference was held November 20-22 in Seaside and we were pleased to welcome 158 attendees and 23 sponsors. I am most proud of the fact that we were able to raise \$8,500 for the Bruce Williams Scholarship fund to assist smaller districts with funding to help them attend, regardless of whether they are OFDDA members.

OFDDA was pleased to award six general scholarships and five Bruce Williams scholarships. I

was especially pleased to present the President's Award to Oregon State Fire Marshal Mariana Ruiz-Temple. Seaside seems to be a real crowd pleaser and we plan to be back in 2027!

The 2026 Conference is scheduled for November 5-7 in Hood River. Registration for this event is scheduled to open by mid-June. We look forward to seeing you there and keeping the momentum going!

Respectfully,

*Joseph Morneau*

541 228-8650

Coburg Fire District

OFDDA

BPSST Board



*Oregon State Fire Marshal Mariana Temple-Ruiz (left) stands with newly inducted OFDDA Board Members, Director Angie Frye, Drakes Crossing RFPD; Immediate Past President Curtis Hoopes, Chiloquin Fire & Rescue; President Joe Morneau, Coburg Fire District; 1st Vice President Jay Cross, Clackamas Fire District 1; 2nd Vice President Cheryl Johnson, Illinois Valley Fire District; Director Brandon Fowler, Chiloquin Fire & Rescue; Director Brad King, Junction City RFPD; Director Bobby Meyer, Aurora RFPD; and Director Don Thompson, North Bay Fire RFPD.*

# General Counsel Relationships and Attorney-Client Privilege

Carrie Connelly, Local Government Law Group P.C.

## General Counsel

Our office regularly receives inquiries from entities seeking representation for a last-minute review of an ordinance, agreement, or other previously negotiated document. Unfortunately, by that point, our input is usually limited by time and circumstances. To help you understand the general counsel relationship and make the most of it, here are a few tips we have collected to help you maximize your investment.

### *When Do We Need a Lawyer?*

Establishing a relationship in advance of a crisis or immediate need ensures that your District has someone on hand that is familiar with your entity and personnel. This allows an attorney to step in and provide advice when needed. When reaching out to your attorney on a new project, be prepared for questions and to provide facts and background documentation. Realize that general counsel will rarely tell your Board what it *must* do. Instead, legal counsel will outline options and associated risks, but your Board will make the policy choices for your entity.

### *Do I Have the Right Person for the Job?*

Be sure your attorney has the expertise for your particular project. For example, if water rights are at issue, you might not use your general counsel. Clients frequently believe that they cannot retain more than one attorney. *Au contraire!* General counsel should encourage you to retain outside assistance for areas beyond their expertise, which will save you time and money in the long run.

### *An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure*

When planning a project, agreement, policy, ordinance or other significant action, run your ideas past general counsel at the get-go. You will then know about any project parameters and pitfalls early on. Calling your attorney once trouble is brewing, or just before signing, guarantees delays and additional costs.

This concept applies to drafting contracts and ordinances — one size does not fit all. Many clients start with someone else's work, imagining that will save on legal expenses. Your district's needs may appear to align with another entity's, but using their documents is like taking someone else's medication: it may help, do nothing, or cause harm. Plus, template contracts still require a significant level of review and can take more time than initially asking your attorney to prepare the document for you. Starting with legally sufficient documents tailored for your situation can save considerable time — translating into major savings for your entity.

### *Interpersonal Conflict or Legal Problem?*

Multiple individuals — citizens, elected officials, and employees — are essential to your District's operations. In a perfect world, everyone would act professionally and focus on the job at hand at all times. But even in the best run organizations, interpersonal conflicts arise. Does that mean your lawyer needs to be involved? In 99.9% of the cases, no — interpersonal conflict is rarely "illegal." Asking (and paying) your attorney to play referee may not be the best use of your time or limited funds. Counsel can provide the most bang for your buck where unlawful behavior or constitutional rights are at issue.

*(Continued on page 5)*

## **Attorney Client Privilege**

### *Attorney-Client Communication*

Advice provided by your general counsel is confidential and privileged communication between that attorney and your entity. No single individual (Board member or staff) is authorized to “waive” that privilege by sending legal advice to uninvolved third parties. Doing so can waive the attorney client privilege and open up all communication on that matter to public records requests. Therefore, carefully consider before forwarding a confidential email to District contractors or consultants. A better option is often to repackage direction on District letterhead over your signature. Also, be very careful about how and where you store attorney advice and who has access to it within your District’s systems.

### *Is AI Confidential?*

In this day and age of rapidly advancing technology, not only may forwarding emails waive your District’s attorney-client privilege, but similar “efficiencies” may place that information in the universe of ChatGPT, Gemini, and other AI sources. For example, placing confidential District information or attorney advice in a ChatGPT search bar makes that information public, thus available for that engine to pull the information into other responses.

In short, ChatGPT and other AI agents are *not* confidential. AI logs every conversation, including personal data shared by the user. AI then trains on that data and uses it to generate responses to all users. The wide range of services now performed by AI, including composing emails, further compromises the attorney-client privilege. Not only does AI use conversations in response to third-party users, that information may be reviewed by human AI trainers. Bottom line, refrain from placing confidential information in AI platforms to avoid jeopardizing your District’s attorney-client privilege and confidential information.

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## **Aurora RFPD Celebrates New Station**



*Pictured: Gubernatorial candidate Christine Drazan and Aurora RFPD Board President Bobby Meyer helped celebrate the opening of the district’s new station.*

The Aurora Fire District recently celebrated the opening of its new Ehlen Road Station, marking a significant milestone in enhancing emergency response capabilities for the growing community. The station was designed with modern operational needs in mind, featuring updated apparatus bays, firefighter dorms, and dedicated training and workspace for both volunteer and career staff.

Strategically located near I-5 and positioned centrally within the fire district, the Ehlen Road Station provides faster and more efficient response coverage to the surrounding areas. Serving approximately 36 square miles across Marion and Clackamas counties, the station advances the Aurora Fire District’s mission, vision, and values by ensuring safe, timely, and effective emergency services for all residents.

# Fire Service Calls Out Tax Abatement Programs

Genoa Ingram, OFDDA Executive Director

The Oregon Fire District Directors Association (OFDDA) has joined with the Oregon Fire Chiefs Association (OFCA) and the Special Districts Association of Oregon (SDAO) to address tax abatement programs, such as enterprise zones, in Oregon.

In January, Governor Tina Kotek created the Governor's Prosperity Council to advise her on near- and long-term strategies to achieve the goals in her Prosperity Roadmap. According to the Council's [website](#), its 16 members represent different regions of the state, critical industry sectors, and labor - dedicated to the advancement of Oregon's economic prosperity and growth. Their charge is to recommend actionable steps to accelerate Oregon's economy, create good paying jobs, and recruit and grow Oregon's businesses. In a March 4 letter to the Council, OFDDA, OFCA, and SDAO urged the Council to consider the impact of tax abatement programs on emergency services and to find ways to sustainably fund fire and emergency medical services (EMS) by modifying existing enterprise zones, strategic investment programs, or similar economic development tools.

While such tax abatement programs encourage development, they fail to address the need for funding of continued emergency service response which nearly always increases with the expansion of development. Because Rural Fire Protection Districts lack the tools to recover these costs, many find themselves in a position where vital services such as EMS and ambulance transport are placed in jeopardy.

To read the full statement submitted on behalf of Rural Fire Protection Districts, click [HERE](#). The Prosperity Council welcomes feedback from the public as it builds recommendations to accelerate Oregon's economy, create good paying jobs, and recruit and grow Oregon's businesses. Feedback to the Council can be sent to [Prosperity.Roadmap@oregon.gov](mailto:Prosperity.Roadmap@oregon.gov).

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**A special *Thank You* to Special Districts Association of Oregon, title sponsor of the 2026 Oregon Fire Service Conference**

**S | D | A | O** SPECIAL DISTRICTS  
ASSOCIATION OF OREGON

# 2026 Oregon Legislative Recap

Genoa Ingram, OFDDA Executive Director

The Oregon Legislature adjourned *sine die* on March 6 at 4:18 p.m., but not without expanding farm stand regulations, funding Family Planning, bailing out Bay City Hospital in Coos Bay, and approving a \$365 million funding bill for Moda Center renovations. During the session, monitored 304 bills and resolutions were introduced, including:

- 183 House Bills

- 103 Senate Bills

- 18 resolutions and other measures

- 153 measures passed the legislature

  - 37 bills fully enacted (as of March 10th)

  - 116 bills that passed both chambers and are awaiting the Governor's signature as of March 23

Click [HERE](#) for your final Bill Tracking Report.

## **EMS Modernization Program Awaiting Governor's Signature**

[HB 4053](#), introduced by TVF&R firefighter, Rep. Dacia Grayber, enacts many of the provisions of [HB 3572](#) (2025), such as establishing the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Program Fund in the State Treasury and directing the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to create programming for EMS workforce development and training. It also makes changes to the EMS program and associated advisory boards. The bill was amended to change the OHA workforce training and development programming requirements and directs the OHA to establish programming with advice from the EMS Advisory Board.

HB 4053 cleared the House Floor on February 18 by a vote of 41-0 (with 19 excused), and was passed by the Senate on March 2 by a vote of 27-1 (with one excused). As of March 23, it was at the Governor's desk awaiting signature.

## **GEMT Legislation Awaiting Governor's Signature**

[HB 4156](#) was the most critical piece of legislation for the fire service this session as it protects the Ground Emergency Medical Transportation (GEMT) reimbursement. The current GEMT formula for the Oregon Health Plan under Medicaid does not meet the cost of providing these services. The gap between reimbursements for transports and the cost of these services has placed an unsustainable fiscal strain on Oregon's EMS system and the providing fire districts and departments.

In 2016, the Legislature passed [HB 4030](#), which directed the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to implement programs to increase medical assistance reimbursement paid to public providers of emergency medical services (EMS) or other providers who contract with local governments, including a program for Ground Emergency Medical Transportation (GEMT) services (e.g., ambulance) to be provided by governments and federally recognized tribes. The bill directed OHA to implement an emergency services intergovernmental transfer program to cover the costs of EMS services for Coordinated Care Organization patients, it also prohibited OHA from using General Fund dollars for program operation.

HB 4156 modifies language in existing statute related to the emergency services intergovernmental transfer program, replacing the term "intergovernmental transfer program" with "funding mechanism," and permits the use of General Fund dollars to certify a program expenditure. The measure declares an emergency, effective on its passage.

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[Testimony on HB 4156](#) was overwhelmingly in support, including [testimony](#) submitted jointly by OFDDA and the Oregon Volunteer Firefighters Association. The bill passed the House on February 20 by a vote of 42-0; (with 18 excused) and passed the Senate by unanimous vote (with one excused) on March 3 and, as of March 23, was awaiting the Governor's signature.

### **Enterprise Zone Laws Expanded**

[HB 4084](#) was the economic development package proposed by the Governor. The bill creates a fast-track program to be administered by a Joint Permitting Council tasked with establishing project eligibility criteria, reviewing applications, and forwarding eligible projects to the Governor's Office for consideration and determination. HB 4084 also modifies and expands eligibility for participation in Oregon's enterprise zones. The measure appropriates \$40 million from the General Fund to the Oregon Business Development Department (OBDD) for deposit into the existing Industrial Site Loan Fund. The Special Districts Association of Oregon (SDAO) submitted [testimony](#) on behalf of all districts throughout Oregon due to the ability to extend enterprise zones from three years to up to an additional two years, if not longer. The bill, which was amended to specifically exempt data centers from the extension, passed the House Floor on March 4 and passed the Senate Floor on March 6. As of March 23, it is on the Governor's desk awaiting signature. (For related article, see "[Fire Service Calls Out Tax Abatement Programs](#)" in this issue.)

### **Public Meetings Clarification**

[HB 4177](#) adds more predictability and clarity to the public meetings laws as administered by the Ethics Commission. The bill changes the meaning of meetings, convening, and deliberation in Oregon's public meetings law to continue to prohibit a series of communications among a quorum of a governing body. It also adds types of communications that are allowed and not considered public meetings and limits the types of governing bodies required to attend training on public meetings laws. Scott Winkels, League of Oregon Cities, submitted supporting [testimony](#) on behalf of local governments including cities, counties, ports, and special districts.

The bill passed the House on March 4 by a vote of 47-4, (with nine excused), and passed the Senate Floor on the final day of session by a vote of 25-3, (with two excused). It now waits the Governor's signature. As of March 23, the Governor has posted no notices of intent to veto any of the bills passed during the 2026 legislative session, although several newspapers have called on the Governor to veto HB 4177. They point to the following warning from the Oregon Government Ethics Commission: *"This exception would allow governing body members to meet in private and/or communicate privately with each other, outside of any public meeting, in order to gather information. Much of the information gathering that normally occurs in public meetings (work sessions or executive sessions) could instead be done privately ... with no meeting notice, no minutes or recordings, and no news media observers."*

### **Legislature Honors OFDDA 75th Anniversary**

The Oregon Legislature overwhelmingly embraced [HCR 201](#), celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Oregon Fire District Directors Association and the many directors throughout the State who serve their communities. OFDDA appreciates supporting testimony submitted by the [Oregon Fire Chiefs Association](#), the [Oregon State Firefighters Council](#), and our other fire services supporters. While the [Oregon Fire Marshal](#) does not support legislation without approval from the Governor, Chief Mariana Ruiz-Temple offered congratulatory comments on February 12 before the Senate [Committee On Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs](#). OFDDA wishes to thank [Rep. Court Boice](#), [Rep. Anna Scharf](#), and [Rep. Boomer Wright](#) for

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introducing and speaking on behalf of the bill, [Rep. Dacia Graber](#) who co-carried the bill on the House Floor on February 17 where it passed unanimously by a vote of 54-0, (with six excused).

HCR 201 also received unanimous approval in the Senate on February 26 by a vote of 28-0, (with two excused). [Sen. Kim Thatcher](#) did an extraordinary job carrying the Resolution on the Senate Floor. You may listen at [this link](#) and advance the counter to 40:45. To see the testimony before the [Senate Committee On Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs](#), follow [this link](#) and advance to 31:00. Many thanks to all of the fire district directors who unselfishly serve their communities.



*Pictured: Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal Travis Medema, OFDDA Executive Director Genoa Ingram, Oregon State Fire Marshal Mariana Ruiz-Temple.*

### **THANK YOU!!**

Thank you again for the opportunity to represent the fire service before the Oregon legislature these past 25 years. It has truly been an honor. As the OFDDA becomes part of the legislative Alliance, joining forces with the Oregon Fire Chiefs Association and the Special Districts Association in a combined lobbying strategy, we will work together to make the transition smooth and seamless. This new structure will provide an even stronger and more unified voice for the fire service as a whole. I will continue as OFDDA's Executive Director and remain available to assist members and non-members alike.



**ANNUAL TRAINING CONFERENCE**  
**June 17-20, 2026, Brooks Training Center**

*Courses Include*

Apparatus Equipped w/ Fire Pump	Rope Rescue
DPSST Skills Training	Swift Water Rescue
Emergency Medical Response	Vehicle Rescue Technician
Essentials of Fire Chaplaincy	Wildland S-215
Fire Instructor 1	Wildland S-230
Fire Officer 1	Wildland S-290
Pastoral Crisis Intervention	

*Registration Opens Soon*

*Click the logo below to visit one of our 2025 conference sponsors!*



# 2025 Oregon Fire Service Conference Memories



*Oregon State Fire Marshal Mariana Ruiz-Temple received the 2025 President's award from OFDDA President Joe Morneau*



*George Dunkel, SDAO, presents "Hiring the Right Fire Chief"*



*OFDDA Director Don Thompson, North Bay RFPD, enjoys a little quality time with Barney and Probie, Sublimity Fire District therapy dogs*

*Auctions raised more than \$8,500 for the Bruce Williams Scholarship Fund*



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