



Oregon Public Health Association

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To: Chair Vega Pederson and members of the House Committee on Energy and Environment

The Oregon Public Health Association (OPHA) supports the passage of House Bill 4125 in order to better protect the thousands of Oregonians who rely on private wells for their drinking water.

As the crisis in Flint, Michigan makes clear, unsafe drinking water is a serious health threat. That holds true in Oregon, where approximately 23% of our residents rely on private wells as their primary source of water – to drink, to bathe in, and to cook their food. Yet this valuable water source can become contaminated.

Drinking contaminated well water causes chronic and acute health problems. Oregon's most common pollutants found in well water are nitrate, arsenic and bacteria.

- **High nitrate levels** are especially dangerous for infants and pregnant or nursing women. Health risks include miscarriages, birth defects, thyroid disorders, gastric or bladder cancer and methemoglobinemia, or "blue baby syndrome," an illness that occurs when nitrate interferes with the ability of blood to carry oxygen.
- **Arsenic** is a known carcinogen that occurs naturally in many parts of Oregon. Recent research found that arsenic is actually 17 times more carcinogenic than stated in current EPA guidelines.
- **Fecal bacteria contamination** can cause diarrhea and vomiting, and certain strains of E. coli bacteria can be deadly, especially for children.
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OPHA supports HB 4125, which would help protect Oregonians from unsafe well water contaminated by bacteria, arsenic, nitrate and other harmful contaminants. The bill would increase outreach about the health impacts of contaminated well water and the importance of regular well testing, and it would require that all landlords test well water regularly and share results with tenants.

HB 4125 will increase awareness of this important problem and ensure that renters know whether their water is safe to drink. OPHA urges your support.

Sincerely,

Jessica Nischik-Long, MPH | Executive Director
Oregon Public Health Association