



February 6, 2024

Oregon House Speaker Dan Rayfield
Oregon Senate President Rob Wagner

RE: Capital Construction Request – Emergency Communications of Southern Oregon (ECSO 911)

Dear Speaker Rayfield and President Wagner,

The Ashland City Council is submitting this letter with our strong support for the Capital Construction Request on behalf of Emergency Communications of Southern Oregon (ECSO 911) and their current county-wide public safety radio infrastructure build-out project.

ECSO 911 is an ORS 190 organization comprised of approximately 30 law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical service providers in the region. ECSO 911 serves all of Jackson County and Crater Lake National Park, providing 911 call handling and dispatching services to citizens and public safety agencies. The service area of the member agencies also includes parts of Josephine, Klamath, Douglas, Curry and Siskiyou (CA) Counties.

In 2014, ECSO 911 began a study and preliminary work on upgrading the outdated public safety radio infrastructure to modernize the system and provide more robust coverage in our geographically diverse region. After conducting the study and consultation with a national radio consulting firm, ECSO 911 approached Jackson County voters with a \$28,000,000 measure in 2019 to approve general obligation bonds to improve the public safety radio system. The measure passed with 58% voter approval.

Bonds were issued by Jackson County in 2020 and the project moved forward. As a result of inflation, unexpected circumstances, and expenses beyond the control of ECSO 911, the cost for completing the project has increased. ECSO 911's conservative estimate of a budget shortfall is approximately \$4.5 million.

We are facing a critical timeline. Bond proceeds must be spent by March 2026. For the system to go live, construction must be completed in 2024, and the new system must be up and running simultaneously with the current one for approximately six months. Services will then shift to the new system, which must also be operated for a few months before system acceptance. The final release of bond funds hinges upon final system acceptance. Clearly, every month counts.

Our region is extraordinarily vulnerable to wildfire—six of the top ten communities at risk of wildfire in Oregon are within Jackson and Josephine Counties. With the rising threat of wildfire, a Cascadia earthquake event, severe storms and other climate-related extremes, reliable emergency communication is imperative.

The Ashland City Council respectfully requests the Oregon Legislature support the Capital Funding Request made on behalf of ECSO 911. While residents of the region have stepped up with a bond initiative, additional funding is vital to the safety of citizens and first responders in the region.

Sincerely,

Tonya Graham, Mayor, City of Ashland

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