

Testimony of the Wade Family  
IN SUPPORT OF HB2404, Relating to ground water that is used for domestic  
purposes  
Before the House Oregon Environmental Council  
March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017

I was 8 months pregnant with Richard when we moved into our rental on April 13th, 2015. During our walk-through, our landlord informed us the home was supplied water via a well. As a family who drinks water primarily more than any other fluid (soda, juice, and other drinks are not commonly found in our household), water is a vital resource for drinking and eating.

Richard was born May 26th, 2015 at a healthy 8 pounds 4 ounces- the largest born of our then three boys. At Richard's 2 week well child check, he had returned to his birth weight and was placed at the 64th weight percentile for boys his age. By the time of his 2 month well child check, he had dropped to the 18th percentile in weight - his pediatrician attributed this to family genetics, but this was not something that had occurred with Richard's older brothers so my husband and I took notice. We were hard on ourselves, wondering if feeding habits could be improved, and we focused on feeding as frequently as Richard wanted. Our efforts did not produce the results we were aiming for, and at Richard's 4 month well child check, he weighed in at a small 12 pounds 15 ounces- dropping to the 3rd% in weight for his age.

Our pediatrician urged us to supplement breastfeeding with formula, and that's when we started noticing something strange - Richard had blue lips. I went through the motions - is he cold? Did he just drink something cold? The noticeably blue lips and fingers too came and went, but our pediatrician seemed to think this was not a concern. She again pressured us to supplement with formula and to start giving solid food, yet Richard remained under the 5th percentile in weight for his age. I felt like we must be horrible parents with our child on the brink of malnutrition. We continued doing the very best we could and ensured Richard was fed whenever hungry. Nothing changed. His weight, height, and head circumference all showed decline in growth pattern. Then, shortly before Richard turned 1 year old, we discovered something alarming.

It was April 30th, 2016 and Central Point was hosting its Annual Master Gardener Show, where they had a booth encouraging free well water testing that was conducted on-site, specific for nitrates. My husband and I both thought it would be valuable to have the free test performed on our well water after speaking with the booth vendors and seeing the map of known plotted reportings of elevated nitrate water all too close to where we lived. We went home, pulled a sample of our well water, and returned to the show for the test. They ran the test and told us that the EPA limit for safe consumption of water is 10ppm of nitrates, but that our sample taken fresh from our direct well water source was 15ppm or higher (the test they used only went to 15). They advised us to immediately stop consuming the water,

which we did. They also advised to get in touch with our landlord to see what to do from here, recommending a lab test for all contaminants to ensure appropriate action is taken for safe drinking water. Ultimately, our family comprised of a pregnant then nursing mom, dad, 6 year old Gerald, 4 year old Tommy, and just shy of 1 year old Richard had almost exclusively consumed water of unacceptable quality per EPA standards for over a year.

Since then, our landlord agreed to professional, certified lab testing of our well water which showed nitrate levels of 19.2 ppm and bacteria contamination. Our landlord has installed a reverse osmosis system under our kitchen sink which has reduced our water taken from the reverse osmosis faucet to nitrate levels under 5 ppm. We also have a UV light installed to clear the bacteria. Since eliminating our contaminated water source from our consumption on 4/30/16, Richard has finally demonstrated a positive growth trend. Although he still remains small for his age, especially in height, his weight is now above the 20th % among children his age, a percentile ranking he hadn't achieved since birth. We are taking his improved health in strides, not knowing what the future may hold but knowing that he is drinking a safe water source. Developmental delays have also been noticed by the pediatrician since Richard reached one year of age but we are optimistic that the gaps in Richard's growth and development will be made up in time. While we can't go back in time to save our family the stress and worry associated with the health hazard, we can potentially save other families from the same. Our home was purchased by our landlord just the month before we moved in. The water purity was tested as required per Oregon law, and the results reported to our landlord noted that the nitrate levels were an unacceptable limit for safe drinking per the EPA standards. We were failed by the system. Our landlord did not supply us this information and there was no way for us to know that our water source was contaminated from the very start of consumption.

I believe that our landlord was not aware of the danger associated with consumption of high nitrate drinking water due to lack of knowledge and lack of accountability with testing results reported out of limit. I also believe that our pediatrician did not have the environmental impact education needed to circumvent the ongoing health hazard to which our family was exposed - Richard could have died from Blue Baby Syndrome associated with nitrate poisoning.

We strongly support the accountability for safe drinking water that this bill provides as well as the education plans. Education around the matter for several key individuals who played a part in our story (from our family to our landlord to our pediatrician) in addition to accountability of landlords to proactively provide safe drinking water would have saved our family from the stress and health effects, and would in the same respect help protect other tenants and ground water consumers.

Thank you for taking the time to hear our story and for your consideration in helping to prevent our story from turning into another family's story here in Oregon.