

This non-partisan report was prepared by volunteer members of the League of Women Voters of Lane County.

### **Measure 20-383**

#### **South Lane County Fire & Rescue Levy**

**Official Title:** Five-year local option tax for general operations.

**Referral:** This measure is referred to voters by South Lane County Fire & Rescue District (SLCFR).

**Question:** Shall the District impose \$0.94 per \$1,000 assessed value for five years beginning 2026-27 to fund general operations? This measure may cause property taxes to increase more than three percent.

#### **Financial Impact**

This measure would replace the existing levy of \$0.47 per \$1,000 of assessed value with a new levy of \$.94 per \$1,000 of assessed value, starting in fiscal year 2026-2027.

*Note: Assessed value (AV) is the value used to calculate property tax. It is shown on the property tax statement. It is NOT the same as real market value (RMV), which is the market price of the home.*

The owner of a median-priced home in the district with an assessed value of \$198,639 would pay \$15.56 per month or \$186.72 per year. Because this is an increase of \$0.47 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation, this means that the amount of additional tax would be \$7.78/month or \$93.36 per year. The measure is expected to raise approximately \$2,444,580 to \$2,751,395 per year over five years, for an approximate total of \$12,978,604.

#### **Probable Result Of A “Yes” Vote**

A “YES” vote would support a third ambulance and six additional full-time staff and one apprentice. It would also support equipment maintenance and replacement. Taxes would increase.

#### **Probable Result Of A “No” Vote**

The current rate of \$0.47/\$100,000 of assessed valuation would remain in place until it expires in 2027-2028. There would be no increase in property taxes. It would leave in place current response rates for fire and emergency services.

#### **Background**

South Lane County Fire & Rescue provides fire and life safety services within the territory of the Fire District 24/7 via a combination of paid professional staff and trained volunteers. South Lane County Fire & Rescue serves about 33,000 residents. The district’s ambulance service area is larger than its fire coverage area, which increases demand for medical emergency response.

The district’s call volume has increased by 62% since 2014, in part because the population of the service area is growing but also because the population is aging, contributing to demand for medical help. During peak times, a single call often coincides with multiple additional emergencies, which can leave no personnel immediately available to respond. Mutual aid from neighboring districts has become harder to secure. Additional staffing through the proposed levy would increase capacity, which is intended to help reduce wait times for emergency response. The majority of the district’s calls are medical emergencies, which account for approximately 84% of all calls. About 12% are fire-related, and 4% fall into other categories of emergency response. Roughly three-quarters of calls come from the Cottage Grove station area, with the remaining quarter originating from Creswell. The district now averages 15 calls per day..

There are four fire stations, one each in Cottage Grove and Creswell and two in more rural areas, one west of Creswell on Camus Swale Rd and one outside of Saginaw. The Cottage Grove station is typically

staffed with five personnel, while the Creswell station is staffed with two. During minimum staffing periods, Cottage Grove has three personnel and Creswell has two. The district operates two of its four fire stations (Cottage Grove and Creswell) 24 hours a day.

The Insurance Services Office (ISO) issues ratings that are used by most insurance companies to help determine premiums for fire coverage. South Lane County Fire & Rescue is rated as a Class 2 district in Cottage Grove, placing it among the highest-rated fire protection levels outside of major metropolitan areas. Creswell is currently rated as a Class 4. Improved staffing and resources help the district maintain these ratings, which can directly affect insurance costs for residents and businesses.

The first local option levy for SLCFR was passed in 2012 at a rate of \$0.47 per \$1,000 assessed value, to fund operations and staffing necessary to meet increased fire and ambulance call volume; it was renewed in 2017 and 2022. The current levy expires in FY 2027/2028. If this levy passes, the existing property tax levy of \$0.47 per \$1,000 of assessed property value would end early and be replaced by the new property tax levy of \$0.94 per \$1,000 of assessed property value.

A measure similar to this one was defeated by voters in November, 2025. South Lane Fire and Rescue has prepared an extensive summary of the tax rate for the district, showing that South Lane Fire and Rescue is in the bottom 10% of Fire Districts in Lane County in terms of tax revenue. When compared to 7 comparable districts in other counties, South Lane is the second lowest, with a tax rate half of that of the highest tax rate. The call volume has increased 62% since 2014. Contributing to the defeat of the measure in November 2025 may have been the low voter turnout in the off-year election.

### **Proposal**

The new levy would allow the Fire District to meet increased costs and call volumes by funding:

- Six new full-time positions and one additional apprentice.
- Purchase of a third District ambulance.
- Increase daily staffing from seven to ten personnel.
- Other services, apparatus replacement, facilities maintenance, and equipment replacement.

Without the new levy funding, the Fire District would need to reduce its level of support to the community.

### **Supporters Say**

- While the increase in the levy will increase taxes, the investment helps to maintain the insurance ratings that allow it to have one of the highest-rated fire protection levels outside a major metropolitan area, which directly affects insurance costs for residents and businesses.
- Increased staffing means fire engines remain staffed during medical emergencies instead of crews rotating between fire engine and ambulance for response, which in turn decreases response times and increases response coverage.

### **Opponents Say**

- Expenses are continuing to increase.
- Many families can't afford an increase in property taxes.