

## LETTER IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 3173

I have been made aware that House Bill 3173, the fairs funding bill, is up for a hearing in the House Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee.

I am the volunteer president of Friends of Multnomah County Fair, inc (FMCF). Our fair has been a treasured tradition in our community since 1907. In 1996, the County turned over operation of our event to FMCF, a small group of volunteers dedicated to continuing the fair. We are one of the few fairs in Oregon that gets no financial support from our County government or hotel taxes and we are dependent upon State lottery funds to exist. Aside from lottery funding, we take in less than \$15,000 annually in vendor fees and small donations, giving us a total budget of less than \$70,000 each year to put on our entire fair. That includes the rent for our venue, exhibitor premiums, entertainment, and insurance. We haven't been able to host the vendors last year or this year due to pandemic restrictions placed on events by Governor Brown, so that creates additional financial concerns. We did produce a virtual fair in 2020.

Multnomah County Fair does not own a fairgrounds as we don't have the financial ability to purchase and maintain facilities. We must rent space from Historic Oaks Park to hold our event. We work with schools and youth organizations to encourage and assist kids up to age 18 to participate in our youth fair categories. Our youth departments fill to capacity every year. Since we must operate under the rules of Oaks Park, we are not able to charge a gate admission and have no direct way of earning any significant cash to fund our youth programs. Without support of the lottery funds, we will likely be the first county fair in Oregon to cease to exist. I understand that many of the smaller counties are in the same boat, so others would likely follow.

In a normal year, our fair hosts an average of 35 Portland Metro area vendors, selling items such as food, crafts, and all kinds of commercial goods. We also hire a few local entertainers. The fair provides an opportunity for the proprietors of such small businesses to make their living. If additional funding were to be made available, we could afford to rent more of Oaks Park facilities in order to expand the fair's offerings. That would include accommodating a larger number and greater variety of vendors as well as allowing the ability to hire more local entertainers. While we are currently a volunteer run fair, if funding is increased, we would be able to provide an economic opportunity to local residents by hiring some part time staff.

In addition, the youth programs offered at all Oregon fairs are invaluable. I began my personal fair participation as a 10 year old in 1967 and that involvement was significant towards making me the confident and successful adult I am today. Since then, I have not missed a year of entering my own exhibits in fair competitions. The current world situation is presenting significant challenges for today's youth. I hope you can find a way to pass HB 3173 so that kids may receive the many unique benefits that our fairs offer.

Larry Smith, Board President  
Friends of Multnomah County Fair, Inc.