

March 25, 2021

House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

Re: HB 3173

Chair Witt and Committee Members:

As an Oregonian I am quite proud of our county and state fairgrounds for the service that they provide to us. 365 days a year they provide a valuable place of economic activity, business incubation, emergency response, social and health services, recreation, education, and much more. I observe that my county fairgrounds in Eugene is constantly bringing new services to Oregonians, and I wonder at the speed and efficiency that they bring to the effort.

In the summer of 2020 alone, they provided shelter to those seeking refuge during the pandemic and no other place to go and to people and animals displaced by wildfires. They have supported citizens in emergency situations many times, quickly and with facilities and resources that are not readily available other places. I read and hear news stories about fairgrounds across the state doing the same thing.

One of the remarkable things was the level of volunteer effort that the fairgrounds motivate. During the wildfires, the number of people on hand to help, and the stores of food, clothing, and other supplies that were donated was astounding. And it all happened within a day or two of the fires breaking out. A survey of fairgrounds showed that people donated more than 200,000 volunteer hours to their local fairgrounds that year. That equals the full-time labor of 100 people for a full year. What a remarkable resource to motivate such widespread support from their communities. Oregonians can be proud.

Why are we so lucky? How is this all supported? I am further impressed that each fairgrounds only receives about \$50,000 per year from the state. How fairgrounds leverage that level of support into the services they provide is heartening. Oregon can produce great service quickly, effectively, and with love for their fellow residents – friends and strangers alike. The boards of directors, staff, and volunteers of our fairgrounds must be the most efficient producers of public service in Oregon.

That state support also highlights the other services fairgrounds provide. From local small-scale farmers at the farmers market, to the auto and RV dealers who hold sales on the grounds, our local fairgrounds is an economic dynamo. Youth sports activities, recreational shows, it is a rare day that I drive by the fairgrounds and do not see something going on. And on top of this, when disaster strikes, they still react and serve.

Clearly fairgrounds have demonstrated that they are excellent stewards of public resources. What they receive is modest. Imagine the good resulting from passage of HB 3173. Please vote yes and move this thing along. Oregonians deserve it.

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