



# Marion County

## OREGON

### Board of Commissioners

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March 24, 2021

#### BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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Representative Brad Witt, Chair  
Representative Vikki Breese-Iverson, Vice Chair  
Members of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

#### **RE: Support House Bill 3173 - Funding for County Fairs and Fairgrounds**

Dear Chair Witt, Vice Chair Breese-Iverson, and Members of the Committee:

In the last year, county fairgrounds in Oregon have provided essential services for emergency COVID response, disasters and vaccination clinics, while experiencing extreme loss of revenue to operate and maintain these grounds.

Most fairgrounds are host to fairs, youth education events, cultural festivals, trade shows and expositions, equestrian events, craft and hobby shows, consumer shows, non-profit fundraisers, and community events each year. In 2020, nearly all those events were cancelled leaving counties and its fairgrounds financially strapped and ineligible for most federal COVID relief funding.

In September 2020, wildfires across Oregon brought thousands of residents to fairgrounds seeking shelter, safety, as well as housing and rescue for families and livestock. Many of these grounds had been temporarily shut down with staff furloughed or laid off. Even with the facilities completely cut off from funding and resources needed for full operation, our fairgrounds transformed overnight and the emergency needs of each community were met. Armies of volunteers and community members rallied to answer the call for help alongside of federal, state, county and local non-profit organizations.

Enter 2021, and fairgrounds across Oregon were called upon once again to step up and assist with mass vaccination sites. Fairgrounds have also been used for essential services to continue during COVID restrictions, such as conducting court hearings and proceedings too large to house safely in city or county courthouses. Oregon's county fairgrounds are here to serve, even when there is no way to pay staff or fund the operations. Many of these facilities are in dire need of improvements so they can continue to meet the needs of today and the future.

A recent economic study by Oregon State University estimated that fairgrounds generated an economic footprint of approximately \$52 million in output, \$28 million in value-added income, and 867 full- and part-time jobs.

Fairgrounds are economic hubs in our communities. Most recently in 2019: Oregon fairgrounds hosted 6.15 million people during annual fairs and over 17,000 local events, bringing business to local hotels, restaurants, retail establishments, and service providers.

- Over 600 non-profit groups used fairgrounds to generate more than \$10 million in charitable donations.
- 10,000 volunteers dedicated over 200,000 hours of volunteer service at their local fairgrounds.
- Fairgrounds directly employed 479 workers with a payroll of over \$10 million.

HB 3173 will eliminate an old funding cap put in place years ago and provide an additional investment of approximately \$165,000 per county per year. The bill also funds a capital infrastructure study that is essential in making sure fairgrounds are ready for events and future emergency disaster response.

Please support and fully fund HB 3173 so Oregon's fairgrounds can continue to be a hub of safety, rescue, and recovery for communities.

Sincerely,



Kevin Cameron  
Chair



Danielle Bethell  
Vice Chair



Colm Willis  
Commissioner

CC: Marion County Legislative Delegation