



March 25, 2021

State of Oregon Legislature
Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support of House Bill 3173

Dear Committee Members:

The Benton County Event Center and Fairgrounds urges support for House Bill 3173 to provide funding from the Oregon State Lottery to county fairgrounds. In the past year, fairgrounds across the state have stepped up when our communities needed them the most. Through the global pandemic, wildfire response, and now vaccination efforts. During the past year Benton County Event Center & Fairgrounds has managed a homeless camp on-site for COVID high risk individuals, provided laundry/shower facilities for Safe Camp homeless, provided space for trials when the courthouse could not be used, and served as a wildfire evacuation center for evacuees and animals.

Meanwhile, our fairs, youth programs, nonprofit fundraisers, cultural festivals, and community social events were all canceled, leaving fairgrounds without much needed revenues, and in many cases fairgrounds as government agencies were ineligible for most federal COVID relief funding. Even before the pandemic, most fairgrounds across the state were suffering from deferred maintenance of buildings and infrastructure.

When not shut down due to COVID, our fairgrounds are an economic hub in our communities. In 2019, 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 nonprofit groups used our 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. Prior to COVID, the Benton County Event Center & Fairgrounds hosted more than 1,100 events annually, everything from 4-H club meetings to large festivals, improving the quality of life in our community.

HB 3173 will eliminate an old funding cap in place for decades and provide an additional investment of approximately \$165,000 per county per year. The bill also funds a much needed capital infrastructure study so that we can make sure fairgrounds are ready for events and more importantly, emergency disaster response, going into the future.

We encourage you to continue your commitment to county fairgrounds by eliminating the funding cap and supporting the capital needs infrastructure study so that fairgrounds will be ready to serve their communities when needed.

Sincerely,

Lynne McKee

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