



Clatsop County

District 1 Commissioner

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February 25, 2021

Senate Committee on Housing & Development
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Senate Bill 622

Chair Jama and Members of the Committee,

Levees were built throughout the 20th century to help reduce the risk of flooding on lands adjacent to oceans, rivers, and streams. In Oregon, there are well over one thousand miles of levees spread out across the state. In fact, most of you have levees in your districts, if not very close by. These levees were built in urban and rural areas alike, from Burns to Klamath Falls, Pendleton to Portland, Coos Bay to Warrenton, and everywhere in between. Unfortunately, in most of these communities, local jurisdictions struggle to keep up with the necessary maintenance, let alone completing the work required to bring the levees up to modern day standards and comply with shifting federal safety standards for levees.

In 2015, the Oregon State Legislature recognized the importance of levee infrastructure by creating a levee-related loan fund under the Special Public Works Fund (SPWF) of Business Oregon's Infrastructure Finance Authority (IFA). Although the loan fund proved immensely helpful to the jurisdictions that were able to finance a loan, many were unable to take advantage of the funding because they could not afford to pay back a loan over time, even at the IFA's modest interest rates. So, in 2019, the State Legislature created the Levee Grant Program and allocated \$15 million in lottery bond sales to the fund (HB 5030). Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the State was unable to issue lottery bonds in 2020 so no funding has been made available through this program. Meanwhile, levee projects remain incomplete, putting more residents and businesses at risk.

Many communities are eagerly awaiting the opportunity to apply for this grant funding, so they can afford to make critical improvements to their flood safety infrastructure. Senate Bill 622 allocate \$10 million in net proceeds from lottery bond sales to the Levee Grant Fund to support the planning and execution of levee improvement projects along with levee investigations to identify their adequacy for federal certification and accreditation.

Shortly after Hurricane Katrina, fourteen (14) diking districts in Oregon were listed at-risk by the United States Corps of Engineers (USACE), and eight (8) of these were in Clatsop County. Many of these diking districts have been dropped from the federal Rehabilitation and Inspection Program (RIP) because their structures have degraded to a point that the USACE can no longer guarantee they will provide any level of protection. Local diking districts do not have the resources to take the steps necessary to remedy the situation.

With grant dollars available for flood safety projects, more communities will be able to get to work planning and constructing these critical public safety projects. This will reduce the risk of flooding

across Oregon and provide important protection to people, property, businesses, and jobs, as well as parks, watersheds, and native fish and wildlife around our state.

Thank you for your previous support of levee operators and communities across Oregon. Please direct \$10 million in lottery bond sales to the Levee Grant Fund. This is a much-needed resource for critical flood safety infrastructure throughout our state.



Mark Kujala
Chair, Clatsop County Commission