



February 21, 2021

Audubon Society of Portland

City of Fairview

City of Gresham

City of Portland

Bureau of Environmental Services

Bureau of Transportation

Portland Parks & Recreation

Portland Water Bureau

City of Troutdale

Columbia Corridor Association

Columbia Slough Watershed Council

Metro

Multnomah County

Multnomah County Drainage District

Peninsula Drainage District #1

Peninsula Drainage District #2

Port of Portland

State of Oregon

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 throughout the state. These levees are critical to providing flood safety and protection to residents, communities, businesses, and agricultural lands. In fact, most of you have levees in your districts or close by protecting your communities. 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, local jurisdictions struggle to keep up with the necessary maintenance, let alone completing the work required to bring this critical infrastructure up to modern day federal safety levee standards that have evolved after Hurricane Sandy and Katrina.

Meeting federal safety standards established by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides communities with many benefits including access to federal aid in the event of a flood and access to affordable flood insurance through FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).

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 with the financial capacity to make debt payments, many were unable to take advantage of the funding due to the inability to meet the debt obligation, 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 was made available through the program. Meanwhile, levee projects remain incomplete, putting more residents and businesses at risk.

Many communities eagerly await the opportunity to apply for grant funding so they can 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 investigation, planning and execution of levee improvement projects to identify their adequacy for federal certification and accreditation.

Unfortunately, there are too many examples of what happens when our state levees cannot withstand the floodwaters resulting from rain on snow events. Many people know about the tragic 1948 flood that washed away the City of Vanport, killing at least 15 people and leaving another 18,000 without homes. Just a year ago, Umatilla River floodwaters overtook a levee in Pendleton, wreaking havoc and damaging over 500 buildings.

With grant dollars available for flood safety projects, more communities will be able to work on planning and reconstructing 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.

Sincerely,

Levee Ready Columbia