



February 25, 2021

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

Chair Jama and Members of the Committee,

Warrenton has 9-miles of levees that protect from flooding from the Columbia River. These levees were constructed by the USACE and are approaching 90 years in age. These levees are critical infrastructure with no federal resources dedicated to maintaining the system. The costs to maintain the levees and meet mandated federal standards has been placed solely on local municipalities. We appreciate this acknowledgement from the State of Oregon that levees are critical infrastructure and that local economies depend on their fitness.

Warrenton has 5300 residents and 3300 jobs representing the largest percentage of employment in Clatsop County. We have the largest industrial area in Clatsop County and are integral to air transportation and commercial economies. Regional assets such as the Astoria Airport, US Coast Guard Base, first responders and public works facilities, a grade school and high school campus - all of these assets are located within a leveed flood-protected area.

Levees were built throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> 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. SB 622 allocates \$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.

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.



Henry Balensifer  
Mayor