



POLK COUNTY

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

POLK COUNTY COURTHOUSE * DALLAS, OREGON 97338-3174
(503) 623-8173 * FAX (503) 623-0896

Commissioners
CRAIG A. POPE
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Administrative Officer

March 22, 2023

House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans.

Re: HB 2948-2 Support

Chair Grayber, Vice Chairs Lewis, Tran and members of the committee,

My name is Craig Pope. I am a Polk County Commissioner and have been the liaison to my fairgrounds team and our Polk County Fair Board for more than 12 years. I am submitting my written testimony in support of this bill and the funding for fairgrounds facilities across the state of Oregon that act as emergency response, respite facilities and operation centers.

It is widely known that many of our Oregon fairgrounds and expo facilities are historically poorly funded and commonly have infrastructure and structural challenges. Though I am not advocating for wholesale change to the way we are funding these facilities, I would like to get my fair and expo facilities to a level of performance that would meet the essential needs of current emergency events. Water, wastewater, stormwater, electrical service and broadband services are first to come to mind for us in bringing our facilities to the 21st century service level performance expectations for a fast growing county.

Our experiences at our Polk County fairgrounds facilities with the Labor Day fires of 2020 that asked us to house displaced livestock, pets and people with RV's that were evacuating from fires in Marion, Clackamas and Polk Counties demonstrated our need to have a fully functioning facility on stand-by. Subsequent to that event, our need to stand up treatment facilities and coordinate with local medical providers and state emergency management during the Covid crisis demonstrated the true need of our fairgrounds as a facility that can provide space for auto traffic and people in a way we could not have met anywhere else in the county.

We have come to realize more and more that our fairgrounds facilities are an essential infrastructure for our emergency response capabilities and that we should improve all facets of the facilities to meet the probable and the unexpected potentials. The events of the recent past have shown us that we truly are partners with our neighboring counties in regional and statewide emergencies and should anticipate emergency situations beyond the single county proportions we had experienced in the past. These expectations demand a more robust property that is ready to meet those needs beyond our local ability to appropriately fund.

Thank you for your attention to this very important need. Please move HB 2948 with the -2 amendment forward.

Commissioner Craig Pope