

COLUMBIA COUNTY

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March 23, 2023

Oregon House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301-4048

Re: House Bill 2948 – Allowing Grants for Fairgrounds Used as Emergency Evacuation Sites

Honorable Chair Grayber, Honorable Vice Chairs, and members of the committee:

Columbia County enthusiastically supports House Bill 2948, which develops and implements a program to award grants for improving fairgrounds used as emergency evacuation sites.

As recently as 2020, Columbia County has utilized our fairgrounds to provide Mass Care services to support wildfire response throughout the state. Our fairgrounds provided space and facilities to support evacuees, family pets and livestock that were displaced during the event. The ability to receive and adequately care for livestock is critical to our rural communities, which rely on them for food and income.

However, the fairgrounds would benefit from improved infrastructure to support evacuees, which could also serve the larger community. A sizeable open-sided roof structure would serve as a gathering place and point of distribution for evacuees and could efficiently serve additional community purposes during other events. The option to provide semi-supported housing with travel trailer hookups has been informally expressed and reflects the emergency management philosophy of maintaining familiar surroundings for displaced families. The positive effects an evacuated family experiences simply by being together in their own trailer, rather than in a strange place, cannot be overstated.

Stakeholders across Columbia County have expressed that Mass Care must be a priority. A few months ago, a working group that included representatives from Columbia County (the Emergency Management Department, the Public Information Officer, the Sheriff, and the Director of Public Health), the Chairman of the Local Emergency Planning Committee, the Chairman of the Fire Defense Board, and the Chairman of Homeland Security and Emergency Management Commission (a group of public safety stakeholders) came together to discuss the emergency response needs in Columbia County. Together, these leaders represent dozens of community stakeholders throughout

the county. The workgroup recommended to the Columbia County Board of Commissioners that Mass Care services should be a priority for the community. The Board of Commissioners agreed, adopting the recommendations with Resolution 5-2023, codifying the county's first Integrated Preparedness Plan (IPP) as an official plan and prioritizing Mass Care for the next three years. The IPP outlines when the county will draft our first Mass Care Plan in the fourth quarter of 2023. The county anticipates that the Fairgrounds will continue to be the primary facility supporting Mass Care efforts countywide due to its size, versatility, and accessibility.

House Bill 2948 supports this priority and guarantees a pathway to ensure our current fairground facilities are prepared to support future emergency response efforts. It will fund plans to mature our fairgrounds' facilities infrastructure to increase resilience and improve our ability to care for evacuees during emergencies. It will fund improvements to grounds to provide service tent campers and travel trailers to provide safe refuge for the displaced. House Bill 2948 will do that, and counties statewide will benefit from it.

Columbia County has been and will continue to be a good neighbor, helping nearby counties in their times of need.

Respectfully,
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
FOR COUMBIA COUNTY, OREGON



Casey Garrett, Chair



Kellie Jo Smith, Commissioner



Margaret Magruder, Commissioner