



SOUTHERN OREGON
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Date: February 13, 2024

Testimony on HB 4124 – CREF

The Southern Oregon Historical Society, which was incorporated in 1948, is one of Oregon's principal historical societies, a repository of archives and artifacts, and has the second largest collection of historical materials in Oregon. SOHS owns two historic properties: our 1857 Hanley Farm Living History Museum (located in Central Point, OR) and our 26,000 square foot downtown Medford headquarters, a Historic Landmark which was a one-of-a-kind architectural prototype originally built by J. C. Penney in 1948. SOHS has owned this iconic building since 1988.

While our Penney's building holds SOHS's public research library and our two-dimensional archives (maps, papers, photos, books, etc.) which support the library, the major portion of the building is currently unused. Since late 2022, we have been engaged in raising funds to remodel the central core of the building into a public Event Center offering multiple spaces for arts and culture and accommodating over 350 people for public and private gatherings. The Cultural Resources Event Facilities (CREF) program, being spearheaded by the Cultural Advocacy Coalition of Oregon, includes a \$500,000 grant to SOHS to help fund the estimated \$1.25 million cost of this project.

Since Medford's major downtown events facility closed shortly before the pandemic with no plans to reopen, Medford was left without a location for large scale meetings and events. As Medford Mayor Randy Sparacino puts it: "Medford's lack of downtown community event space has been a longstanding problem for the City, which has only worsened in recent years as the few previous facilities have closed. The City's lack of convenient event gathering space adversely impacts both commercial and family opportunities for assembly."

The need for our Event Center is well defined—of importance to both our community and SOHS. Converting our original Penney's sales floor space into a 350-person public event space will fill an important community need and assist SOHS's own financial stability. Anticipated revenue will also allow SOHS to reestablish a public museum, expand our work in preservation of our historic holdings, and provide expanded public interpretation of our Collection.

Our \$1.25 million Event Center project has been endorsed by the City of Medford, the Chamber of Commerce of Medford/Jackson County, the Downtown Medford Association, California-Oregon Broadcasting, Travel Medford, Medford Fabrication, Naumes, Inc.,

Edenvale Winery and many other community institutions as providing a central facility for arts and cultural events, movies and small concerts, meetings and conferences, and as a community gathering place that provides a key element in reinvigorating the downtown core. Additionally, our entire bi-partisan Legislative delegation provided support letters to CACO seeking inclusion of our project in the CREF slate.

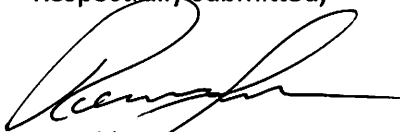
This project will also provide a significant economic contribution to the broader community and for downtown Medford. In particular, the Event Center will produce new job opportunities and employment for a variety of local vendors providing services and goods which would be ordered by Event Center renters. Many of the vendors would be Medford area small businesses such as catering services (all food that renters serve in the Event Center will be catered) and food and beverage suppliers; party suppliers of linens, table settings, decorations, etc.; local musicians and entertainers engaged for performances at events; florists; and more.

Use of the Event Center will also spill over to local businesses with visitors/guests shopping at area retail stores, seeking lodging accommodations, dining in area restaurants, and exploring local culture. In short, the Event Center will contribute greatly to the vitality of downtown Medford as a whole as Mayor Sparacino's observation suggests.

The total CREF slate of 14 projects contained within HB 4124 consists of extremely important community investment projects which will dramatically increase access to the arts and culture across Oregon. We urge your support for our project and the other 13 worthwhile projects in the CREF slate.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ronald Kramer', written over a horizontal line.

Ronald Kramer
Executive Director