

Submitter: Blair Cash

On Behalf Of: Hillsboro Hops baseball team

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Capital Construction

Measure: HB5202

It is my understanding that, beginning this Friday, February 16, the members of Oregon's legislature will take up a number of financial bills, including HB 5201 (Bonding bill) and HB 5202 (Capital construction bill). Both of these bills will have an impact on efforts by the Hillsboro Hops minor league baseball team to complete the funding they need for a new ballpark if the team is to remain in Oregon. I am writing to urge you, on behalf of me and the many other baseball fans around the state, to vote in favor of these bills and approve the final funding for the Hops' new stadium.

The Hops have been in Hillsboro since 2013, having moved from Yakima, Wash., due to a poor facility there, and have provided fans in the greater Portland area, and from around the state and country, many hours of family-friendly, inexpensive, fun-filled entertainment. The Hops' front office and team members have conducted baseball clinics for youth, contributed to philanthropic causes, benefited the economy of nearby businesses, provided full and part-time jobs for people (me included!), and in general are just all-around good neighbors. They are a source of positive pride in the community and have enhanced the quality of life for everyone, especially those to come to the park to enjoy a game.

The threat of losing the Hops is real if a new stadium cannot be secured. Major League Baseball is determined to improve the quality of facilities for its minor league affiliates, and the Hops' current home, Ron Tonkin Field, while nice and functional, is not up to the standards MLB has set for its players. A new stadium would guarantee the Hops' presence here for years to come, and would also be used (as Ron Tonkin Field has been) for college and high school baseball games, soccer games, concerts, and other events that are looking for a 6,000-or-so capacity.

The funds the Hops are seeking from the state is a relatively-small amount. Over 75% of the funding has already been secured from private funds, with most of the rest coming from local investment by the city of Hillsboro, which sees the team's presence as a positive. We are not talking about "subsidizing billionaires" in this case, as is so often the charge when major league owners ask for help from their cities; minor league team owners are businessmen who want to make a profit, yes, as does every other business, but they are realistic in knowing that they will never become wealthy off of minor league baseball. In addition, if MLB is ever to expand and (hopefully) add a team in Portland, MLB officials and owners need to know that local and state leaders want to have them in their community. Supporting our minor league teams will send them a message that baseball is important here.

Finally, on a personal note, I encourage you to approve these bills for MY sake. I have been the official scorer for minor league teams in the Portland area (Portland Rockies, Portland Beavers, Salem-Keizer Volcanoes, Hillsboro Hops) since 2000, and the stipends I have received for this work, though small, are an important source of income for me, especially now that I am retired. If we ever do get major league baseball in Portland, my experience improves my chances of becoming the official scorer for our new MLB team, which would be a “dream-come-true”. Please don’t dash those dreams. Let’s keep the Hops in Hillsboro, and look to the future and perhaps even loftier heights for baseball in Oregon. Thanks for your gracious consideration of this request, and please vote YES!