

TRAVIS NELSON
STATE REPRESENTATIVE
HOUSE DISTRICT 44
NORTH/NORTHEAST PORTLAND



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1517A

February 28, 2024

Chair Grayber, Vice-Chairs Lewis and Tran, and members of the House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government and Veterans,

My name is Travis Nelson - Representative of District 44, North and Northeast Portland. I write in support of Senate Bill 1517A.

As a Representative of my community and like all of you, we serve as stewards of our shared history and help as guardians for the collective future. As you sit and deliberate on SB 1517A, it's crucial to remember the significance of the Columbia River's urban levee system in Multnomah County—the largest of its kind in our state. Stretching 27 miles from North Portland through Gresham, Fairview, and Troutdale, this system is a critical barrier between the confluence of the Willamette and Sandy Rivers and the communities we are serving to protect and represent.

We should remember that Memorial Day in 1948, when the far western end of this levee system faltered, unleashing floodwaters into the City of Vanport. Within hours, Oregon's second-largest city, known for its remarkable racial integration, was obliterated. The aftermath was devastating with at least 15 lives lost, and 18,000 people were rendered homeless. The US Army Corps of Engineers intervened post-disaster to repair the breached section, yet the scars of that day remind us of our vulnerability to nature's might and the privilege of what an operational and well-maintained levee system is doing for our state.

These investments cannot be overstated. Our commitment to safeguarding our community from catastrophic events like that of 1948 is not only our administrative duty, but that of a moral obligation. I would also like to remind the committee that this system protects some of our states most critical infrastructure. This includes the Interstate Bridge, the I-205 bridge, and intercontinental railroads, and three interstate freeways.

The stakes of inaction are high, not only in terms of potential human and economic losses but also in the tangible impacts on our constituents' everyday lives. Current residents who benefit from the National Flood Insurance Program may find themselves ineligible should we fail to enhance our flood management infrastructure.

Lastly, this investment will also directly impact the investment support of our regional economy and will bolster environmental restoration and critical infrastructure.

I urge this committee to consider the broad spectrum of implications tied to SB 1517A. Our decision today will echo through history, much like the events of 1948. We cannot bear to continue to kick this burden down year after year. The opportunity is here. Let us choose a path that fortifies, protects and ensures the prosperity for the future of Oregon.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and I urge you to vote yes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Travis Nelson".

State Representative Travis Nelson
House District 44, North/NE Portland