

Thank you for the opportunity to share my strong support for HB 2136.

Without warning or advanced planning, the twin crises of pandemic and wildfire have dramatically expanded the role of Oregon's County Fairgrounds. They're now even **more** central to their communities' well-being than they were in the preceding century...and that's saying a lot.

I came to fully understand that in 2020, when the Almeda Fire destroyed thousands of homes in my district and instantaneously took basic housing away from a staggering number of my neighbors. In a matter of hours, the Jackson County Fairgrounds turned into an emergency shelter and critical services hub for many of these people. The eruption of multiple megafires at once significantly delayed a customary Red Cross response to this disaster; by default, the Fairgrounds, managed with no preparation by an amazingly resourceful staff and cadre of volunteers, took care of so many people with such profound and immediate needs that the episode could almost be called a miracle.

The Fairgrounds found ways to keep this mass of people sheltered, fed, and safe for *weeks* beyond what anyone expected. This all happened without any resources dedicated for the purpose, or any reason to anticipate that that this need would instantaneously materialize in the Labor Day fires. A miracle.

And though while not quite so extensive or sudden, the Jackson County facility quickly stood up to bolster the County's response to the Covid crisis is another example of county fairgrounds stepping up *on their own initiative* to make a huge difference in community recovery.

We don't know what, where and when, but we know that severe disasters are part of our future. We know that by and large our communities lack infrastructure to respond to them. County fairgrounds, over the last few years, essentially volunteered to be that *de facto* infrastructure when virtually no other sector could. They gifted us with a big initial step towards the imperative of improving Oregon's emergency response and recovery system. HB 2136 is about building on that first step with targeted resources and a more strategic lens. In light of the challenges we know are coming, that's a wise and timely investment. My thanks to Representatives Scharf and Evans for bringing it forward, and to this committee for considering my perspective.