

February 25, 2025

Senate Committee On Labor and Business
Oregon State Capitol

Yes on SB 771, Support Oregon community rodeos with grants for capital facility needs

Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Bonham, members of the Senate Labor and Business Committee:

My name is Greg Leo. I am an Oregon rodeo fan and have enjoyed our local rodeos my entire life. Today, I am here as a volunteer testifying in support of SB 771, a bill to support the facility infrastructure needs of community-based rodeos in Oregon.

Throughout Oregon, communities organize events that act as economic drivers for local businesses, sources of community pride, and opportunities for highlighting Oregon's hospitality and heritage. This bill responds to the pressing need for capital improvements to rodeo arenas and grounds, which support community rodeos in smaller towns across our state.

Many Oregon community rodeo venues are aging and need capital improvements, including new bleachers, repairs to older buildings, livestock pens, public restrooms, and other infrastructure and event facilities. However, capital improvement funding is hard to come by in many of these smaller rural communities. SB 771 will improve event safety by helping these communities update their facilities and providing much-needed support to modernize and repair these community event venues.

Oregon rodeos are important community gatherings for many rural Oregonians. They bring people together to celebrate our Western traditions and are venues where many Oregon visitors can share this sport. Urban or rural, Oregonians love their rodeos.

Oregon rodeos act as economic engines for the communities they support. During the rodeo and related community events, they draw visitors and businesses to our towns. Rodeo fans spend money on food, drink, and accommodations, boosting local economies. Rodeos also create a space for connection among family, friends, and neighbors. Old friends reunite, and new friendships emerge. Business transactions occur at these events, fostering connections that generate economic opportunities and vitality for these rural areas.

Oregon rodeos provide genuine opportunities for business connections. Dedicated volunteers come together under the guidance of a local board to organize and stage events. Generally, there are few paid staff members, and many committed volunteers plan throughout the year, working tirelessly day and night when the rodeo occurs in their town. There is often insufficient funding to make necessary capital improvements to the rodeo grounds for enhanced safety, visitor comfort, or upgrades to arenas and facilities.

The funding criteria in SB 771 have been carefully crafted to ensure that the money is available to the rodeos most in need, specifically in communities with populations under

12,000. Additionally, no single grant exceeds \$250,000, allowing the available funding to be distributed to the capital needs of many applicants. Business Oregon will distribute the funds in a manner that maximizes the impact on the communities with the greatest demonstrated needs, ensuring the funding is directed where it can do the most good.

To prepare for this hearing, I did a little research: There are 56 Oregon Rodeos listed on the Travel Oregon website:

<https://traveloregon.com/things-to-do/events/culture-heritage-events/rodeo-roundup/>

Oregon's rodeos fall into essentially three categories:

1. Professional rodeos associated with the Professional Rodeos Cowboy Association (PRCA) in the Columbia River Circuit; these are the big rodeos with world-class contestants

<https://columbiarivercircuit.com/>

2. Community rodeos located in small and sometimes unincorporated communities across Oregon - the *Travel Oregon Cowboy Christmas Map* has some but not all of the community rodeos in Oregon

<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2025r1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/133036>

3. Rodeos affiliated with Oregon's County Fairs

<https://www.oregonfairs.org/p/directory>

All of Oregon's rodeos could use assistance with facilities, but the need is greatest in the community rodeos in small towns, unincorporated communities and tribal reservations in our state's rural areas. In my view, a grant program where community size and facility need are the main criteria makes the most sense.

For me, the Oregon summer is framed by the 4th of July Rodeo in St. Paul, a few days after Legislative Sine Die, and the end-of-summer gathering at the Round-Up and Happy Canyon in Pendleton during the second full week of September. In between, in many smaller places around our state, Oregonians gather in aging arenas to celebrate community in the Western tradition. Let's help them keep the Oregon community rodeo viable for future Oregonians.

Please vote to DO PASS on SB 771, supporting Oregon Rodeos by providing grant funding for capital facility needs of rodeos around Oregon.

Sincerely,

Greg Leo, rodeo fan and volunteer

Oregon Community Rodeo Association

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