



March 6, 2025

Dear Legislators,

RE: Urgent Support for HB 2304 Investments in Our Fairgrounds for Emergency Preparedness and Community Resilience

I am writing to you today on behalf of the Crook County Fair Board to express our wholehearted support for the proposed measure HB 2304 which seeks crucial investments in our county and state fairgrounds. These sites have proven indispensable not just as cultural and economic hubs, but as vital assets in our emergency management infrastructure.

In recent years, our fairgrounds have risen to unforeseen challenges, including the global pandemic, devastating wildfires, and other crises. They have swiftly been converted into testing centers, vaccination clinics, emergency shelters for people and animals, and even makeshift hospitals. Their role in our emergency response framework has been nothing short of critical.

Despite their pivotal contributions, it has become increasingly clear that our fairgrounds' infrastructure is struggling to meet the health, and safety demands of our community. The cap established two decades ago on the funding from lottery proceeds significantly hinders our ability to maintain and improve these essential facilities.

The proposed legislation to eliminate this cap and to fully allocate 1% of lottery funds to our county fairs, with a distribution of 90% to county fairgrounds and 10% to the state fairgrounds, is a step in the right direction. Furthermore, the additional funding of \$20.839 million for state fairgrounds infrastructure improvements will fortify them as regional emergency and evacuee centers.

Moreover, funding a study and additional capital project improvements will ensure our fairgrounds can continue to serve as resilient disaster response centers and vibrant hubs for economic, social, cultural, and educational activities.

Our annual events like the Fair, Rodeos, Fundraisers, Junior Livestock Auction, Christmas in the Pines, and numerous other community gatherings underscore

the economic and social significance of our fairgrounds. These events support local businesses and provide a platform for non-profit groups to thrive.

I urge you to consider these proposals seriously and support the legislation to ensure our fairgrounds can continue to serve our community effectively and safely. Our readiness for future emergencies and our community's resilience depend greatly on this crucial funding.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your continued service to our state.

Warm regards,
For and on behalf of the Crook County Fair Board

Gail Merritt

Gail Merritt, Chair Crook County Fair Board