



Clatsop County

Fair and Expo



92937 Walluski Loop
Astoria, OR 97103
(503) 325-4600 phone
www.clatsopcofair.com

March 6, 2025

House Committee on Economic Development, Small Business and Trade
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support HB 2304 – Investing in County Fairgrounds for Economic and Emergency Preparedness

Dear Chair Nguyen, Vice-Chairs Diehl and Isadore, and Members of the Committee,

As Fairgrounds Manager for the Clatsop County Fairgrounds, I write in strong support of House Bill 2304, which provides critical investments in county fairgrounds across Oregon. Fairgrounds are not only cultural and agricultural institutions but also vital economic engines, emergency response centers, and year-round community gathering places. However, rising costs, aging infrastructure, and outdated funding constraints have made it increasingly difficult for fairgrounds like ours to meet the growing needs of our region.

Economic Impact and Revenue Challenges

The Clatsop County Fairgrounds play a vital role in our rural economy, supporting local businesses, nonprofit fundraisers, and tourism, generating revenue for hotels, restaurants, and vendors. As participation grows, aging infrastructure limits our ability to expand and enhance events.

In recent years, declining timber revenues, rising inflation, and post-pandemic costs have placed increasing strain on our operations. These financial pressures make it harder to maintain facilities, invest in improvements, and keep events affordable for vendors, service providers, and attendees.

HB 2304 provides an essential solution by removing the outdated \$1.53 million cap on lottery allocations for fairgrounds, ensuring consistent, increased funding to upgrade infrastructure, attract events, and sustain fairgrounds for future generations.

Addressing Aging Infrastructure

Like many fairgrounds statewide, we face challenges in maintaining buildings, barns, restrooms, and utilities. Without investment, these facilities will continue to deteriorate, impacting event operations and emergency response capabilities.

HB 2304 directs the Oregon Business Development Department to develop a five- and ten-year master plan for fairground improvements, ensuring strategic long-term investments in infrastructure.

Increasing Costs and Operational Constraints

Since COVID-19, operating costs have increased significantly for expenses such as insurance, utilities, staffing, and equipment. Land-use restrictions can be a barrier to expansion and staffing shortages make it difficult to operate at full capacity. These challenges also affect event renters, trade shows, livestock events, and emergency response operations that rely on our facilities.

Additionally, carnival operators, food vendors, and service providers face rising costs, making it harder for them to participate in fairs. Investing in fairgrounds stabilizes these industries within our local communities and supports their continued success.

Fairgrounds as Emergency Response Centers

Fairgrounds have long served as evacuation centers, emergency shelters, and relief sites during disasters. However, many lack critical upgrades to function effectively in large-scale emergencies.

HB 2304 authorizes \$20.8 million in bonds for the Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center as a regional emergency hub, reinforcing the role of fairgrounds in disaster response and setting the stage for further investments at the county level.

Immediate Action is Needed

This bill declares an emergency, making it effective immediately upon passage. Given the financial and operational challenges fairgrounds face, this funding is essential to keep these vital institutions running and prepared for future growth.

Conclusion

HB 2304 is a necessary investment in the long-term sustainability of Oregon's county fairgrounds, supporting local economies and strengthening our emergency preparedness. It will provide economic relief, modernize infrastructure, and enhance emergency readiness. By addressing financial and operational constraints, this legislation ensures that fairgrounds can continue serving our communities for generations.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge your YES vote on HB 2304.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Kyle Sharpsteen
Fairgrounds Manager
Clatsop County