

March 20, 2025

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Senate Bill 713, Continued Support of the Statewide Levee Grant Program

Chair Golden and Members of the Committee,

Levees were built across the country throughout the 20th century to help protect lands from flooding. In Oregon, there are well over one thousand miles of levees and flood safety embankments throughout the state. These levees provide critical protection to urban and rural areas alike in Oregon. This infrastructure exists everywhere from Vale to Warrenton, Klamath Falls to Portland, Milton-Freewater to Turner, Rainer to Reedsport, and everywhere in between.

Unfortunately, local jurisdictions that operate these systems struggle to keep up with the necessary maintenance and capital investments needed to bring this critical infrastructure up to the modern-day federal safety levee standards. As the threat of climate-driven storms, atmospheric rivers, and rain-on-snow events increases, the need to invest in our state's levee infrastructure becomes more important.

In 2019, the State Legislature created the Levee Grant Program and allocated \$15 million in lottery bond sales to the fund (HB 5030). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this bond sale did not move forward. In the 2021 session, the Legislature again allocated \$15M in lottery bond sales to the fund. Business Oregon completed the rulemaking and has awarded or obligated these funds, supporting levee operators throughout the state. In 2023 session, the Legislature allocated \$10M in lottery bond sales to continue supporting levee operators throughout the state. The fund is established to provide 60% to rural communities and 40% to urban communities. Today, this fund provides funding to communities of all sizes working to make their residents safer and better prepared for floods.

This grant program provides vital funding to communities, allowing them to make critical improvements to their flood safety infrastructure. Business Oregon has commitments for the full \$10 million available through the 2023 allocation. With continued need to adapt to a changing climate that brings stronger and more frequent storms and changes in federal flood safety regulations, the need remains strong for continued investment by the state in the Levee Grant Program.

Since 2015, the flood safety district in northern Multnomah County, the Urban Flood Safety and Water Quality District, has been working with communities and lawmakers across the state. This coalition represents cities, counties, and special districts of all sizes facing a common challenge:



Urban Flood Safety and Water Quality District
1880 NE Elrod Drive, Portland, Oregon 97211
503-281-5675 | www.urbanfloodsafetyor.gov

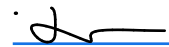
increasing flood risk, ageing infrastructure, changing flood safety standards, and limited capital funding to make necessary improvements. Many communities eagerly await the opportunity to apply for this grant funding. Senate Bill 713 of the 2025 Legislative Session allocates \$15 million in net proceeds from lottery bond sales to the Levee Grant Fund to continue supporting the investigation, planning, and construction of flood safety improvement projects.

With continued grant dollars available for flood safety projects, communities will be able to work on evaluating and improving this important public safety infrastructure. This will reduce the risk of flooding across Oregon, making our communities more resilient while providing important protection to people, property, and businesses, as well as parks, open spaces, and fish and wildlife around the state.

Sadly, there are too many examples of what happens when our levees cannot withstand floodwaters. Many people know about the tragic 1948 flood that washed away the City of Vanport, killing at least 15 people and leaving another 18,000 without homes. In 2020, the Umatilla River overtook a levee in Pendleton, wreaking havoc on the community and damaging over 500 buildings, as well as closing parts of Interstate 84.

Thank you for your previous support of levee operators and communities across Oregon. Please direct \$15 million in lottery bond sales to the Levee Grant Program through your support of Senate Bill 713. This is a much-needed resource for critical flood safety infrastructure throughout our state.

Sincerely,


Jim Middaugh (Mar 20, 2025 14:38 PDT)

Jim Middaugh
Executive Director
Urban Flood Safety and Water Quality District



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Final Audit Report

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