

To the Joint Subcommittee on Capital Construction:

My name is Ben Karlin, and I am a long-time participant and coach in the Oregon Masters swimming community. I am writing to voice my strong support for the \$5 million construction grant proposed for the Osborn Aquatic Center in Corvallis.

Osborn is far more than a local pool. It is a critical regional resource—a cornerstone of aquatic sports in the Willamette Valley that serves thousands of Oregonians through youth programming, high school athletics, adult fitness, and competitive Masters swimming. Many of us in the Masters community have trained and competed at Osborn, and its absence has already left a noticeable void.

I have a long personal history at Osborn Aquatic Center. I began competing there in my early childhood, returned throughout my high school years, and when I joined the Tualatin Hills Barracudas Masters team, Osborn was the site of my first Masters swim meet. The facility has played a meaningful role in my athletic development across decades and stages of life.

In her book *Why We Swim*, author Bonnie Tsui reflects on how swimming is more than exercise—it's a fundamental human connection to water that touches on survival, healing, and joy. For Oregonians, this connection is especially resonant. We are surrounded by breathtaking natural water features: rivers, lakes, waterfalls, and the Pacific coastline. Whether hiking, camping, or visiting the beach, our proximity to water is part of our lifestyle. But this beauty comes with risk. Without access to safe, structured environments where children and adults can learn to swim, the consequences can be devastating.

According to the National Drowning Prevention Alliance, drowning remains the leading cause of unintentional death for children aged 1 to 4, and the second leading cause for children aged 5 to 14. The presence of public pools is a key intervention—they are where people, especially those from lower-income or underserved communities, gain access to life-saving swim instruction.

This hits especially close to home for me as a father of two young children, ages 4 and 7. I want them—and every child in Oregon—to have access to safe facilities where they can develop the confidence and skills they need around water. Public pools are not a luxury. They are a critical part of a state's health, safety, and education infrastructure.

The situation in Corvallis reflects a larger national crisis. Across the country, public aquatic facilities are closing or falling into disrepair. The lack of access to quality public pools in Oregon is part of this troubling trend. As someone who has coached both high school athletes and adult Masters swimmers, I've always believed that swimming is not just about sport or fitness. It is a life skill—one that can and does save lives. Every child and adult deserves the opportunity to acquire that skill.

The closure of Osborn due to structural issues has underscored how vital and irreplaceable this facility is—not just to Corvallis, but to surrounding communities across the Willamette Valley. Osborn has hosted regional competitions that bring swimmers and families from all over

Oregon, supporting both community health and the local economy. Its rehabilitation is a statewide priority.

I urge you to approve this funding and help restore a facility that promotes lifelong health, youth development, and community connection. The loss of Osborn would be a blow not just to Corvallis, but to the broader Oregon swimming community—and to the generations of children who deserve the chance to enjoy our waters safely.

Thank you for your consideration and your commitment to preserving essential public infrastructure.

Sincerely,  
Ben Karlin  
Tualatin Hills Barracudas Masters Swim Club