

Submitter: Michelle Kaseberg
On Behalf Of: Baker County
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On
Capital Construction
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1601

Written Testimony on SB 1601 – Section 24: County Fair Allocation
Chair, Vice-Chair, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in strong support of SB 1601, specifically Section 24, which updates the County Fair Allocation. Oregon's county fairgrounds—and the Oregon State Fair—have proven themselves indispensable community assets, especially in recent years. When our state faced unprecedented challenges, these facilities stepped forward without hesitation.

During the global pandemic, wildfire emergencies, and statewide testing and vaccination efforts, county fairgrounds were transformed overnight into testing centers, makeshift medical facilities, shelters for thousands of displaced people and animals, and mass vaccination clinics. Their ability to mobilize quickly and serve the public in times of crisis underscores their essential role in Oregon's emergency response infrastructure.

Beyond emergency response, county fairgrounds are year-round economic and cultural hubs. They host local fairs, youth education programs, cultural festivals, trade shows, equestrian events, craft and hobby shows, consumer expos, nonprofit fundraisers, and countless community gatherings. These activities strengthen local economies, support small businesses, and provide educational and cultural enrichment for Oregonians of all ages.

However, the state's funding level for county fairgrounds has remained static for years and was never indexed to inflation. As a result, many fairgrounds are struggling to maintain aging and deteriorating infrastructure, threatening their ability to continue serving their communities effectively.

Each year, Oregon's fairgrounds collectively:

- Welcome approximately 6 million visitors during annual fairs and host more than 17,000 local events, supporting local hotels, restaurants, retailers, and service providers.
- Provide space for over 600 nonprofit organizations, helping generate more than \$10 million in charitable contributions.
- Support youth agricultural education, with Junior Livestock Auction receipts exceeding \$12 million, funding scholarships for students pursuing careers in food production and agriculture.
- Engage 10,000 volunteers, who contribute more than 200,000 hours of service

to their local fairgrounds.

- Directly employ several hundred workers, with a combined payroll of more than \$10 million.

An economic analysis by Oregon State University found that county fairgrounds generate an estimated \$52 million in economic output, \$28 million in value-added income, and support 867 full- and part-time jobs statewide.

SB 1601 addresses a long-standing funding cap that no longer reflects the needs or economic realities of Oregon's fairgrounds. By removing this outdated cap, the bill will provide an estimated \$165,000 in additional annual investment per county, enabling fairgrounds to maintain critical infrastructure, continue essential community services, and remain prepared for future emergencies.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge your YES vote on SB 1601.