



Senate Committee on Rural Communities and Economic Development

Re: Senate Bill 7-2 Amendment – Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center

Chair Roblan and Members of the Committee,

Please accept this correspondence as the Oregon Park Association's (OPA) written testimony in support of Senate Bill 7 with the -2 amendments. The legislation would transfer the operations of the State Fair and Expo Center to a public corporation, relieving the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) from the undue burden of managing the program. OPA supports this measure for two simple reasons; we believe that the move will result in a higher level of service to the public in our state and local parks, as well as to the visitors of our State Fair and Expo events.

Many elements of government have been forced to restructure how we deliver services in recent years. In various programs the focus has shifted to the public demand that government run efficiently and effectively, much like a private business. This shift in values has been noticeable in statewide parks and recreation programs as much as any other element of public service. Parks programs, including Oregon State Parks are expected by our customers to make good, sound business decisions that result in the long term stability of our services. As a result, park managers have been forced to focus on our core values, consistent with our missions. OPA believes that the financial burden placed on the OPRD by the State Fair prevents the department from focusing efforts on managing high quality state parks, of which the public has grown accustomed to and expects. The State Fair requires OPRD to allocate both human and financial resources to the operations that would otherwise be used to maintain high levels of service to Oregonians and tourists in our State Park system. These resources are valuable in managing state parks, as well as local parks through the various grant programs and technical assistance that OPRD provides.

As noted above, Oregonians expect that managers of state resources are technically capable and fully equipped to manage the programs that they are stewards of. Effective stewardship requires technical capability and sufficient resources, both financial and operational. As it currently stands, we believe that Oregonian's are not exposed to the full capability and related benefits of the State Fair and Expo Center. The public corporation developed by SB 7 would be

assembled with experts in fair and expo operations, as well as business and tourism leaders. With strong goals, this ensemble of individuals can provide the State Fair with the leadership necessary to grow the State Fair and Expo, rather than simply manage the assets, which is currently what is being done. A properly organized board, focused on a strong business model and mission can take the State Fair and Expo to new levels, resulting in increased economic development for our communities. Combined with the flexibility to operate without the burden of public restrictions, the program could realize the potential that we all know it possesses.

In summary, OPA does not believe that OPRD operations of the State Fair and Expo Center is congruent with the OPRD mission and associated business model, resulting in a decreased level of service to parks throughout the state. This burden greatly affects local park providers, as we depend on OPRD for financial and technical assistance. We believe that it is in the best interest of our citizens to relieve OPRD of this obligation and place the State Fair and Expo in a position of growth, rather than the stagnant model that it is currently operating under.

Our members strongly urge you to support Senate Bill 7 with the -2 amendments.

Sincerely,

Steve Lambert
OPA President