

June 11, 2019

House Finance and Revenue Committee 900
Court Street NE Salem, OR 97301

Chair Nathanson, Vice-Chairs Findley and Marsh, and Members of the Committee,

Every year, there is a 10 percent chance of a major flood along the lower Columbia River in Multnomah County, and the risk only grows as climate change and rising sea levels continue to impact river conditions. As you know, the 27-mile levee system on Oregon's banks of the Columbia River greatly reduces this risk. We must manage it properly so that it can continue to do to protect our citizens and their livelihood.

The levees not only guard 59,000 jobs and critical infrastructure like the Portland International Airport, they also protect over 7,500 residents, including 1,400 county and state inmates, as well as sixty residents of Dignity Village, an alternative shelter community in northeast Portland.

This vulnerability to our residents and businesses is what has driven our participation in the Levee Ready Columbia partnership for the last five years. Over the last three months, the Levee Ready Columbia partners, including Multnomah County, have worked diligently to incorporate suggestions, update and revise Senate Bill 431. These amendments represent hours of work to refine, clarify, and improve the legislation. We are extremely proud of this collaborative process and we are confident that the bill and proposed amendments before you today are stronger because of this work. The most recent amendments, which include a more sophisticated definition of green infrastructure, better define the interim board, provide better guidelines for public works projects, and provide clarity for the bonding process, are all improvements that we are happy to see included in this piece of legislation.

Creating the Urban Flood Safety & Water Quality District is the critical next step we must take to modernize this important infrastructure, improve flood safety for an area critical to the region's future, and take a more holistic approach to the management of the historic floodplain along the Columbia. I encourage your support on SB 431 A.

Sincerely,

Deborah Kafoury
Multnomah County Chair