



March 25, 2021

House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

Re: HB 3173

Chair Witt, Vice-Chair Breese-Iverson & Hudson, and Members of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee:

As you know, county fairgrounds provide a diverse set of services for their counties. They are places where the community comes together to celebrate and learn. But, they also provide vital services and serve as a community resource. Our county fairgrounds host a variety of events that bring opportunities to local businesses and serve as an investment in the variety of industries that spread across Washington County. As such, the county fairground is a vital resource not just to the county but to the community it serves.

Washington County is known for its diverse economic base, but agriculture remains an important piece of the success. The county fair allows our county to showcase this vital industry and creates a necessary opportunity for those businesses to engage with the rest of the community. Key to this work is keeping the grounds and facilities capable of safely housing the events and livestock that are the centerpieces of these events. Washington County has been working to keep its fairgrounds accessible and successful for this use through strategic investment and careful financial planning.

During 2020, our fair grounds could not be used for the traditional purposes due to COVID-19. Instead, the county tapped the staff to provide new services to the community. Our fairgrounds were used to provide a safer, COVID compliant houseless shelter. By using this land as a place to address a population that needed safety to prevent further spread in this vulnerable population. In addition, during the Labor Day weekend fires, our county fairground staff again found itself answering the call of those in need by housing the livestock of farmers and ranchers in Washington and Clackamas County at our fairgrounds much like other counties (see one evacuee's story here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48lfnQQ5Vc&t=114s>). They coordinated hundreds of hours of volunteers and donations to assist in the care and upkeep of the animals. These spaces are fundamental to emergency responses.

However, without the annual fair or other events in 2020 and an unclear picture for the fair ground's reopening in 2021, the revenue for this community hub is nearly non-existent. HB 3173 will provide relief to all county fairgrounds and invest in the ability to provide economic

opportunity, community gathering and emergency shelter moving forward. We ask that you support the passage of this bill.

Sincerely,

Leah Perkins-Hagele

Fair Complex Manager

