

Dear Committee Members:

My name is Trudy Overlin and I am the current Fair Board Chair of the Benton County Events Center and Fairgrounds in Corvallis Oregon. I have attempted to register for oral testimony in favor of returning the funding to the Fairgrounds, and either the email response was blocked by a firewall or I did not receive confirmation. Based on time and the fact that I know hearings are going on now I wish to speak to the funding for Fairgrounds and why a return to the amount legislated is necessary. This past year fairgrounds in Oregon were instrumental in assisting the State, and various counties with the fires, housing people and animals when residents had to flee. In addition, the many volunteers that support our fairgrounds, including 4-H, and other users, volunteered their time, equipment, and skills to help those who needed to evacuate horses and livestock and bring them to safe housing, and opening their doors to provide RV parking for residents displaced from their homes. This was all accomplished during a tremendously trying year, where fairgrounds were essentially closed, losing all revenue and having to find creative ways to pay for staff and maintain facilities.

Many facilities such as ours have a lot of deferred maintenance due to a shortfall in funding from the State of Oregon. The funds requested would go a long way to maintaining these valuable assets, including places to house livestock and families in emergencies, but also for other emergencies such as providing a staging area in the need for an evacuation due to flood, fire or even active shooter or other human caused emergencies.

Our fairgrounds has opened up facilities, with no revenue (but with ongoing utilities and other expenses) to our courts so that they can continue to have trials in a socially distant manner, and to accommodate our Emergency Operations Command Center. We helped house those who had no other housing during the COVID 19 pandemic to provide a safe place with hygiene facilities, for these populations to reside, adding work to, and often a lot of damage to, facilities that had to be taken care of and burdened under already taxed budgets.

Most fairgrounds provide a host of entertainment opportunities for their communities and in the region, not just the annual County Fair, which each put on, often at a loss, and in good years barely breaking even. We all support 4H extension activities without reimbursement, with our facilities hosting over 300 a year without reimbursement, but still generating costs.

We have a limited staff and are highly dependent on seasonal and volunteer help for various events and to help maintain our resources, making repairs, and keeping things operating on shoestring budgets.

This past year demonstrated how valuable these facilities are and the role they play in public safety, continuity and sustainability, while still trying hard to stay open, and functional.

Fairgrounds are the bastion of our Agricultural heritage and Oregon History. They are an Asset that is not duplicated elsewhere, which still provides affordable family entertainment, and opportunities for our youth to learn leadership, teamwork and other life skills, when they may otherwise be spending idle time on their devices or other more destructive activities. Our fairgrounds and people stepped up this past year in a big way, despite the fact that staff knew there would not be revenue coming in for most activities. We converted parking lots into additional camping areas, and livestock areas into temporary barns. We turned auditoriums into make-shift court rooms and command centers, or distribution centers for distributing food, clothing and water to those displaced by fire, or those in need due to the pandemic, especially those losing housing and jobs. We also became resources for mass vaccination centers.

Our fairgrounds also did their best to try to arrange socially responsible family events such as a