



February 14, 2023

House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: House Bill 2307, Continued Support of the Statewide Levee Grant Program

Chair Grayber and Members of the Committee,

The City of Warrenton has significant Levees throughout our town that protect lands adjacent to oceans, rivers, and streams. These levees are a critical component of protection against storms and flooding for our community, but many of them are very old and have not aged well. Our city struggles to keep up with the necessary maintenance and new requirements to bring our critical levee infrastructure up to modern-day federal safety levee standards that came about after Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy.

In Oregon, there are well over one thousand miles of levees throughout the state. These levees provide critical protection to urban and rural areas alike. This infrastructure exists everywhere from Burns to Astoria, Klamath Falls to Portland, Milton-Freewater to Eugene, and everywhere in between.

In 2015, the Oregon State Legislature recognized the importance of levee infrastructure by creating a levee-related loan fund under the Special Public Works Fund (SPWF) of Business Oregon's Infrastructure Finance Authority (IFA). Although the loan fund proved immensely helpful to the jurisdictions with the financial capacity to make debt payments, many were unable to take advantage of the funding because they are unable to meet the debt obligation, even at the IFA's modest interest rates. So, in 2019, the State Legislature created the Levee Grant Program and allocated \$15 million in lottery bond sales to the fund (HB 5030). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this bond sale did not move forward. In the 2021 session, the Legislature again allocated \$15 million in lottery bond sales to the fund (HB 5006). Business Oregon completed the rulemaking and has awarded or obligated most of these funds.

This grant program provides vital funding to communities around the state to help make critical improvements to their flood safety infrastructure. Business Oregon has commitments for the full \$15 million available through the 2021 allocation. With continued need to adapt to a changing climate that brings stronger and more frequent storms and changes in federal flood safety regulations, the need remains for ongoing investment by the state in the Levee Grant Program.

With grant dollars available for flood safety projects, the City of Warrenton will be able to work on evaluating and improving this important public safety infrastructure. This will reduce the risk of flooding in our city, making our community more resilient and making our city more attractive as a safe place to live.

Thank you for your previous support of levee operators and communities across Oregon. Please direct \$15 million in lottery bond sales to the Levee Grant Program through your support of HB 2307.

This is a much-needed resource for critical flood safety infrastructure throughout our state.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Balensifer, III
Mayor