



May 5, 2023

Joint Committee on Ways & Means, Subcommittee on Capital Construction
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Support for Section 4 of HB 5030

Co-Chairs Holvey and Girard and Members of the Committee,

Flood safety levees were built across the country throughout the 20th century to help protect lands from flooding. 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 Vale to Warrenton, Klamath Falls to Portland, Milton-Freewater to Turner, and everywhere in between. Unfortunately, local jurisdictions that operate these systems struggle to keep up with the necessary maintenance and capital investments needed to bring this critical infrastructure up to the modern-day federal safety levee standards that have evolved following Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy. Meeting the federal safety standards set by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides communities with many benefits including access to federal aid in the event of a flood and affordable flood insurance through FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).

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. In 2019, the State Legislature created the Levee Grant Program and allocated \$15 million in lottery bond sales to the fund (HB 5030). Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the State was unable to issue lottery bonds in 2020 so no funding was made available through the program. Meanwhile, many levee projects remain incomplete, putting more residents and businesses at risk across the state.

In 2021, the Legislative Assembly dedicated \$15 million to the Levee Grant Fund and those funds have either been spent or committed. 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 strong for continued investment by the state in the Levee Grant Program.

Levee Ready Columbia Partners:

Audubon Society of Portland

City of Fairview

City of Gresham

City of Portland

City of Troutdale

Columbia Corridor Association

Columbia Slough Watershed Council

Metro

Multnomah County

Multnomah County Drainage District

Peninsula Drainage District #1

Peninsula Drainage District #2

Port of Portland

Sandy Drainage Improvement Co.

Many communities eagerly await the opportunity to apply for grant funding so they can make critical improvements to their flood safety infrastructure. Senate Bill 634 of the 2023 Legislative Session allocates \$15 million in net proceeds from lottery bond sales to the Levee Grant Fund to support the investigation, planning, and construction of levee improvement projects.

With grant dollars available for flood safety projects, more communities will be able to work on evaluating and improving this important public safety infrastructure. This will reduce the risk of flooding across Oregon and provide important protection to people, property, and businesses, as well as parks, open spaces, and fish and wildlife around the state.

Sadly, there are too many examples of what happens when our levees cannot withstand floodwaters. Many people know about the tragic 1948 flood that washed away the City of Vanport, killing at least 15 people and leaving another 18,000 without homes. Just a couple of years ago, the Umatilla River overtook a levee in Pendleton, wreaking havoc on the community and damaging over 500 buildings, as well as closing parts of Interstate 84.

Thank you for your previous support of levee operators and communities across Oregon. Please remember these places as you consider lottery bond authorization for the biennium and direct at least \$15 million in lottery bond sales to the Levee Grant Program. This is a much-needed resource for critical flood safety infrastructure throughout our state.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colin Rowan', written in a cursive style.

Colin Rowan
Levee Ready Columbia Program Director