

Testimony to House Economic Development, Small Business, and Trade Committee

Chair Nguyen and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Washington County Fair Board and staff I am writing in support of House Bill 2304.

The Washington County Fairgrounds is a year-round economic, social, educational, and cultural campus dedicated to serving our community every single day by providing affordable space for consumer events, meetings, conferences, youth sport and education events, banquets, weddings, and more.

We are not just a place the annual Washington County Fair is held; we play an essential role in the well-being of our entire community.

The Washington County Fairgrounds serves our community in times of need and crisis providing shelter for people, pets, and livestock during severe weather events, wildfires, floods, and other disasters.

This was highlighted in 2020 and 2021 when we served as a response center during multiple disasters. We were essential to the pandemic response providing space for court services, testing, vaccination, and shelter for the houseless. We also served as a wildfire livestock evacuation center for hundreds of animals and their owners for two weeks during the historic Labor Day fires in 2020, and we served in that capacity again in August of 2024. We have yearly provided shelter for cooling and heating starting with the February 2021 extreme ice storm that knocked out power to thousands, and then again in June 2021 for the historic Heat Dome.

Our fairgrounds is honored to provide these services to our community, and stand-ready to continue to do so but with continual usage comes continual need for health and safety repairs and upgrades to our infrastructure.

Thank you to you and your colleagues, some funding has been made available for fairgrounds infrastructure improvements in recent years and we were able to accomplish small projects with that funding. However, improving deteriorating buildings, inadequate utilities, and equipping the Fairgrounds with emergency equipment comes at a larger cost than our Fairgrounds budget can bear.

House Bill 2304 will help us with stable funding for our fairgrounds so that we can begin to work on improvements to the Fairgrounds that will allow us to continue to meet the needs of our communities.

Thank you,

Leah Perkins-Hagele, Venue & Fair Manager  
Gary Seidel, Washington County Fair Board President  
Bob Rollinger, Washington County Fair Board Vice-President  
Jerry Willey, Washington County Fair Board Member  
Bill Ganger, Washington County Fair Board Member  
Troy Ceballos, Washington County Fair Board Member  
Fatein Mahmoud, Washington County Fair Board Member  
Jason Herinckx, Washington County Fair Board Member