

Testimony in Support of HB 2527

Submitted to the House Committee on Economic Development, Small Business, and Trade

Chair: Representative Daniel Nguyen

Submitted by: Jim D. Cant

Date: [Insert Date]

Chair Nguyen, Vice-Chairs, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jim D. Cant, and I am a 4th generation cattle rancher from Union County, Oregon, where my family and I raise Registered Polled Hereford Cattle. Additionally, I serve as the Agriculture Teacher and FFA Advisor at Imbler High School. I write to you today in strong support of House Bill 2527, which appropriates funding for critical water and sewer improvements to the Union County Fairgrounds.

For generations, the Union County Fairgrounds have served as a pillar of our agricultural heritage and a vital connection between producers and consumers in our rural community. The fairgrounds provide a unique and irreplaceable opportunity to showcase local agriculture, livestock production, and youth agricultural education, fostering an understanding of the role that farms and ranches play in sustaining Oregon's food system.

As someone who grew up exhibiting cattle at the Union County Fair, I have personally experienced the value these fairgrounds provide—not only as a place to honor and celebrate agricultural traditions but also as an educational venue where the broader public can learn about food production, responsible land stewardship, and the importance of local agriculture. With less than 1.5% of the U.S. population directly involved in food production, fairs serve as a critical bridge between rural producers and urban consumers, fostering relationships and mutual understanding.

Beyond its agricultural significance, the Union County Fairgrounds serve the broader economic and social needs of our region. The facilities provide a gathering space for year-round community events, economic development activities, and emergency response efforts. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our fairgrounds played an essential role in providing a safe, accessible, and trusted location for public health services, demonstrating their importance as a community resource beyond just fair week.

As an agriculture educator and FFA advisor, I also see firsthand how the Union County Fairgrounds support student learning and career development. The fairgrounds provide a venue for my students at Imbler High School (with a total high school population of under 92 students) to exhibit their Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAEs). These projects, which range from livestock production to agribusiness and research, teach students essential business, technical, and leadership skills while also making a significant economic impact on our rural community.

In 2024 alone, my students' SAE projects generated \$202,000 in economic impact through their employment, entrepreneurship, and volunteer efforts. The fairgrounds are an essential part of their projects, providing a space to showcase their work, engage with the public, and connect

with industry professionals. Without adequate facilities, students lose a vital platform for learning, growth, and future career opportunities in agriculture.

However, to continue serving our region effectively, the Union County Fairgrounds require urgent infrastructure improvements. Water and sewer upgrades are essential for maintaining health and safety standards, ensuring reliable operations, and expanding opportunities for agricultural exhibitions, community events, and emergency preparedness efforts. Investing in these upgrades is an investment in rural Oregon's future—one that ensures the fairgrounds remain a vibrant hub for education, economic activity, and community engagement for generations to come.

I respectfully urge your support of HB 2527 to fund these necessary improvements. Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Jim D. Cant
Union County, Oregon