



# Clatsop County

## Board of Commissioners

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April 11, 2025

Joint Committee On Ways and Means  
Oregon State Legislature  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

### **RE: House Bill 5006 – Equitable Representation of Rural and Coastal Needs in Oregon’s 2025-27 Budget**

Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez and Members of the Committee,

The Clatsop County Board of Commissioners sincerely appreciates your decision to bring a public hearing on the state’s 2025-27 budget framework to Astoria—one of only six locations statewide. It sent a powerful message that **rural and coastal voices play a vital role in crafting an equitable budget that serves all Oregonians.**

As you work to balance competing needs, we urge you to ensure that rural and coastal counties like ours receive fair consideration, especially as we navigate severe funding challenges in public safety, housing, infrastructure, and essential services. Our region faces unique pressures, from a high volume of visitors straining public safety and emergency services to declining timber revenues destabilizing local budgets. These issues demand targeted investment and sustainable solutions that will allow us to serve both our year-round residents and the many Oregonians who visit our communities.

#### **HOMELESSNESS, HOUSING, AND RELATED INFRASTRUCTURE**

Clatsop County has the **highest per capita rate of homelessness in Oregon.** With the support of the Governor’s Emergency Order funding and strong local partnerships, we have increased shelter capacity **from zero to 95 beds** and successfully **rehoused over 120 families.** However, despite this monumental progress, housing shortages and outdated infrastructure continue to be significant barriers to further development.

Key funding priorities, including HB 3644 for a permanent statewide shelter system, HB 5011 for essential housing assistance programs, and HB 3031 for housing infrastructure investments, are critical for ensuring we can meet the needs of our workforce and unhoused populations. The state’s continued commitment to these investments is essential to the long-term success of our housing initiatives.

#### **PUBLIC SAFETY AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

Public safety in Clatsop County is uniquely impacted by our rural landscape and seasonal population surges, as we have **the second highest rate of tourism in the state.** Our local law enforcement agencies

struggle to keep up with the growing demands, and our 11 volunteer-staffed fire agencies face severe resource constraints.

HB 5004, the Department of Corrections' budget bill, is essential in **addressing funding gaps for state-mandated Community Corrections programs**, which counties like ours are forced to cover with already stretched general fund dollars. It includes a revised community corrections formula that better reflects county costs and ensures full funding for these essential services.

In addition, Clatsop County has submitted a **capital funding request for a Public Safety Equipment and Operations project** to provide 18 local law enforcement and fire agencies with reliable and resilient radio infrastructure. This project addresses critical gaps identified in a recent study, including outdated equipment, poor coverage, and vulnerabilities in the microwave backhaul system. We strongly urge your consideration for this funding request, as these upgrades are essential for improving emergency response capabilities, particularly given the County's high-risk profile for coastal and riverine flooding.

### **SPECIAL DISTRICTS AND WATER INFRASTRUCTURE**

Rural water and sewer districts, as well as cities in Clatsop County, are struggling with **aging infrastructure, limited financial resources, and rising operational costs**. Without sustained investment, these districts risk falling behind in providing safe, reliable water and sewer services—services that are critical for housing development and public health. We urge the state to prioritize funding and technical assistance for these essential infrastructure projects.

As mentioned in testimony at the public hearing in Astoria, the City of Warrenton is facing significant challenges with its wastewater infrastructure. We strongly support **Warrenton's capital funding request to replace their existing wastewater treatment plant** and urge your consideration. The proposed plant, featuring a membrane treatment system, will address compliance issues, expand capacity for the growing community, and protect sensitive estuarine ecosystems. This project is crucial for maintaining environmental standards and supporting future housing and business development, including the Port of Astoria, in one of Clatsop County's fastest-growing cities.

### **HEALTH AND WELLNESS SERVICES FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES**

Our communities continue to face significant gaps in mental health and substance use disorder treatment. Local resources are already stretched thin, **especially for youth**, and without additional support, too many will go without the care they need. Continued state funding is essential to maintain and expand these services, as any cuts would worsen existing shortages and further strain an already overwhelmed system.

We strongly support HB 2056-1 to **fully fund behavioral health programs for crisis response, forensic services, and civil commitment evaluations**, as well as HB 2954 to **invest \$25 million in addiction prevention** to strengthen and expand evidence-based school and community programs. Without this funding, gaps in care will only deepen, leaving vulnerable residents without the services they desperately need.

Furthermore, the well-being of families with young children is central to strong and healthy communities. Programs like **Babies First, CaCoon, and WIC provide critical support from pregnancy through childhood**, offering tailored assistance for children with special health needs and promoting healthy nutrition and development. Public health agencies are uniquely positioned to deliver these essential services, but ongoing funding shortfalls—compounded by uncertainty around future federal support—limit their ability to effectively reach all families. Strengthening state support will allow public health agencies to meet growing demand and ensure timely, equitable access to care for every family—when they need it most.

## **LEVEE INFRASTRUCTURE AND FLOOD PROTECTION**

Flooding poses a significant risk to Clatsop County, endangering critical infrastructure, neighborhoods, and major transportation routes like Highway 101. Our levees require significant upgrades to meet federal safety standards and adapt to increasingly severe storm surges. We strongly support HB 2693, which provides **\$15 million in lottery bond sales for the Levee Grant Program**. This funding is essential for ensuring our communities have the resources needed to protect lives, local economies, and vital infrastructure.

## **SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR THE PROPERTY TAX SYSTEM**

Counties across Oregon, including ours, are experiencing financial strain due to declining funding for the County Assessment Function Funding Assistance (CAFFA) program. **Originally designed to cover 30-40% of our assessment and taxation costs, the program currently funds only about 14% in Clatsop County**, with further reductions expected in the coming year. As a result, the County's General Fund is left to cover the remaining 86-90% of these costs, creating an unsustainable strain on our budget and directly impacting funding for essential services and service levels that are vital to our community.

We strongly support HB 3518, which offers a solution to stabilize CAFFA funding and modernize the program, ensuring the integrity of Oregon's property tax system while relieving pressure on local budgets.

## **TIMBER REVENUE LOSS AND IMPACTS ON LOCAL SERVICES**

Clatsop County is facing a devastating financial impact from the approved Western Oregon State Forests Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), which significantly reduces timber harvests on state forestlands. This reduction will result in an **annual loss of nearly \$3 million for Clatsop County** alone, contributing to a total revenue **shortfall of \$8.5 million across all local taxing jurisdictions**. These losses will directly affect essential public services, leading to fewer law enforcement officers, reduced road maintenance, and the loss of family-wage jobs that sustain our rural communities.

While the environmental benefits of the HCP extend statewide, **the financial burden falls disproportionately on a few counties—Clatsop County bearing the largest share**. Counties are committed to working with the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), the Governor's Office, and Legislators to find long-term funding solutions that address the fiscal strain on both Trust Land Counties, our local taxing jurisdictions, and ODF.

We recognize the difficult budgetary decisions before you and appreciate your leadership in allocating state resources where they will have the greatest impact. Rural and coastal communities are essential to Oregon's economy and environmental stewardship, yet we are bearing disproportionate financial burdens that threaten vital services. **We urge you to prioritize investments in housing, public safety, critical infrastructure, mental health and public health services, and sustainable funding solutions for counties shouldering the financial burden of the HCP**—investments that will strengthen the long-term stability and resilience of communities like Clatsop County.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to continuing our strong partner with the state and supporting your efforts to create a budget that serves all Oregonian.

Sincerely,



Mark Kujala, Chair  
District 1



Anthony Huacuja, Commissioner  
District 2



Pamela Wev, Commissioner  
District 3



Courtney Bangs, Vice Chair  
District 4



Lianne Thompson, Commissioner  
District 5