

April 12, 2025

RE: House Bill 2527 Testimony

Chair Lieber and Sanches, Vice Chairs Girod, Gomberg, and Smith, and Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of HB 2527. For the record, my name is Heather Rajkovich, and I am a member of the Union County Fair Board.

Supporting House Bill 2527, which proposes funding for water and sewer improvements at the Union County Fairgrounds, is not just a matter of infrastructure—it's about preserving a space that is central to our community, our families, and our future.

The Union County Fairgrounds in La Grande, Oregon, serve as a vital hub for the region, hosting the annual Union County Fair which draws over 18,000 visitors each year. But beyond that one week in summer, the fairgrounds remain active throughout the year—used for community events, 4-H and FFA programs, livestock shows, fundraisers, and emergency preparedness. It's a gathering place that offers something to every resident, from young children to older adults.

As a parent, I've experienced firsthand the deep value this space brings. My children showed their animals at the fairgrounds—an experience that taught them responsibility, hard work, and pride in their accomplishments. These experiences were foundational to their development and have inspired them to continue on to college, where they are now pursuing careers in agriculture. It's a full-circle example of how local investment in youth and community spaces has long-term, tangible results.

But this space, so important to so many, has struggled with basic infrastructure. The septic and water systems, which were originally installed decades ago, began failing nearly 20 years ago. Since then, event organizers have had to bring in restroom facilities from off-site—adding complexity, cost, and inconvenience to what should be a seamless operation.

House Bill 2527 would provide the funding necessary to connect the fairgrounds to the City of La Grande's water and sewer systems. This includes constructing a new water distribution system, expanding the septic capabilities to reach more buildings, and installing indoor restroom facilities and a sewer lift station. These updates are not only essential for continued operations but also vital for public health and safety.

Moreover, in times of crisis—like wildfire events—the fairgrounds serve as one of the most sensible and strategic places for emergency response. It has already acted as a staging area in past emergencies, and having reliable water and sewer systems in place is critical for supporting emergency personnel and displaced residents.

Most importantly, the fairgrounds represent more than just land and buildings—it's where memories are made. It's where families come together to celebrate achievements, build community, and connect across generations. I can say with pride that it played a formative role in

my own family's story, and I want that opportunity preserved and improved for the families coming after us.

In conclusion, House Bill 2527 is more than a public works bill—it's a reinvestment in our values, our youth, and our resilience. I urge our lawmakers to support this bill and help Union County Fairgrounds continue to be the heart of our community for years to come.

I appreciate your time and the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,

Heather Rajkovich
Union County Fair Board Member
Union County, OR