

LA GRANDE POLICE DEPARTMENT

GARY B. BELL
Chief of Police



To: Oregon State Legislature - Joint Ways and Means Committee

From: Gary Bell, Chief of Police - La Grande Police Department

Date: April 11, 2025

RE: HB 2527 - Testimony in Support
Union County Fairgrounds Infrastructure Improvements

Co-Chairs and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Gary Bell, and I serve as Chief of Police for the City of La Grande. I'm here to express support for HB 2527, which provides critical funding for water and sewer infrastructure improvements at the Union County Fairgrounds.

From a public safety standpoint, the Fairgrounds is the most suitable location in our region for emergency sheltering, large-scale evacuations, and community reunification during crises. It is centrally located, accessible, and capable of accommodating large groups. But without fully functioning restrooms and utilities, it cannot serve this role effectively.

We often rely on local schools or Eastern Oregon University, but those facilities are frequently unavailable due to regular use. The Fairgrounds offer a neutral, flexible alternative - but they must be operational to meet public needs in times of crisis.

This funding would allow the Fairgrounds to serve as:

- A shelter during wildfires or natural disasters
- A staging area for mutual aid and emergency services
- A family reunification and public coordination center

Union County is a rural area with limited alternative facilities. That's why investing in existing, centrally located infrastructure like the Fairgrounds is so important - for both residents and first responders.

We cannot afford to let a vital emergency resource remain underutilized due to infrastructure shortcomings. HB 2527 represents a strategic and necessary investment in our region's emergency preparedness and public safety.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I respectfully urge your support of this important bill.