



September 23, 2024

To the members of the State Appropriations Committee –

I write to you asking for funds to repair our aging school facilities. Without outside funding this critical work will not be possible.

The Ukiah School is the center of our small community. It's walls have held students for generations and it has long been the core of our community. The building primarily serves students in all grade levels, but is also our community meeting place, the area's public library, the only public access for computers and basic business services, and the regional Red Cross Shelter. It is vital to the function and fabric of our town and citizens.

Often the school facilities are called upon in times of need to provide support when no other facility can. This was apparent this summer when our area was impacted by a significant wildfire threat. Our school was the largest and most capable building to house the Blue Mountain Complex Fire Incident Command center. Within hours of the start of the fires; each classroom, the main halls, the gym, and the playground was filled to the brim with needed fire logistical support teams and firefighters. They stayed for more than 4 weeks with all resources used 24 hours a day. This isn't the first time that regional emergencies have triggered a need for the building. Nearly every significant fire event in our forests have necessitated the use of the school to support fire teams.

Aside from emergencies, the building is the largest gathering space in the community and often hosts funerals, weddings, public concerts, and other events. Additionally, the gym is often used for community intermural sports for all ages, a space for recreation during long winters, as well as its core use for student activities. There is rarely a week on the calendar that does not have non-school functions held in our building.

This essential community resource has served our community for 101 years. Its stewards have worked and invested what they could; keeping it in good repair and upgrading the buildings infrastructure to best meet modern standards. Unfortunately, this has not been enough to combat the realities of time. The aging concrete in the foundation, retaining walls, and sidewalks are cracked and crumbling. The building's 40-year-old vinyl siding has been weathered and sun damaged to the point it is brittle and broken. Several floors in common areas still contain asbestos tiles. The antiquated elevator has reached the end of its serviceable lifetime for current ADA compliance. Our building is in need of repairs that the district budget cannot afford.

The school board and community understands the need for repairs and its impact on the district. Over the past two years the District has applied for many grants and supporting funds in an effort to work the problem. A recent Facilities Assessment and Long-Range Planning Study supported the need for facility improvements. Last May a General Obligation bond was attempted and failed. The post-election data showed that while most citizens understood the need and wanted to support the work, the additional tax was just too much. In an area that is economically struggling and on a very small population, the results were disappointing but not surprising.

I ask humbly for your help to meet this great need. Our District and community need the funds to repair and upgrade our school building so it can continue to serve as a vital resource for our people.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Laura Orr

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Laura Orr', written over a light blue horizontal line.