



9 March 2017

Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
900 Court Street  
Salem, OR 97301

Members of the Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development:

We urge your full support for the Oregon Business Development Department (OBDD). This funding is a critical for local communities to evaluate and improve the state's aging levee systems which are essential for life safety, economic stability and resiliency, state land use plans, and compliance with federal regulations.

The OBDD has been essential to the work of Levee Ready Columbia, an extremely successful Oregon Solutions project with participation from a range of partners including local, regional, state, and federal agencies as well as neighborhood, environmental, and business groups. Levee Ready Columbia is working to ensure that the levee systems in the Portland metro-region, located along the Columbia Corridor and on Sauvie Island, meet our community's need to reduce future flood risk and to avoid the harm to life and property that communities in Oregon have experienced in the past.

In 1948, a flood destroyed the community of Vanport. At the time, Vanport was the state's second largest community and was home to some of the state's most vulnerable populations including minorities experiencing restricted access to housing in other areas of the state and recently returned World War II veterans. At least 15 individuals lost their lives in the flood and the community was abandoned.

Just 16 years later, the Christmas Floods of 1964, regarded as one of the worst natural disasters in Oregon history, resulted in flood events on the Rogue, Sandy, Willamette, Deschutes, and other rivers across the state.

In 1996, Portland came perilously close to another disastrous flood. Our Columbia Corridor levee system held that time, a testament to good planning, funding, and hard work.

The Vancouver Gage, which measures river elevations at the confluence of the Columbia and Willamette rivers, has measured three "100 year" and two "500 year" flood events in the last 125 years. Statewide, there are 333 miles of documented levees reducing the risk of flooding to over 400 square miles of property. The vast majority of Oregon's known levees were constructed over 50 years ago by either local



property owners or by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to reduce the risk of flooding to agricultural areas. These levees are mostly managed by local entities and are in various states of repair.

Since the construction of the levees, the land use in areas behind the levees has changed dramatically and in many ways intentionally, to meet state land use planning goals. For example, in the Portland area, the Columbia Corridor levee system, originally built to serve farmers, now reduces flood risk for critical infrastructure like the Portland International Airport, interstate highways, railroads, and the Columbia South Shore Well Field, a source of drinking water serving over 800,000 Oregonians. This area is essential to the regional and state economy and is home to \$16 billion in annual economic activity and 17 percent of the future industrial growth capacity for the region. Even more importantly, levees reduce the risk of flooding to businesses that generate 10 percent of the jobs in Multnomah County, many of which are blue collar family wage jobs.

A \$10 million appropriation to the OBDD's levee program will support needed evaluation and planning across the state. Without state support to improve levee infrastructure, communities across the state face serious threats to their quality of life, safety, and local economies. First and foremost, failure to properly invest in flood risk reduction infrastructure puts the citizens in harm's way. Additionally, if Oregon's local communities fail to meet new and higher federal standards, they face the prospect of onerous and costly flood insurance premiums (due to FEMA remapping formerly protected areas as special flood hazard areas), strict regulation of development, and the loss of federal assistance during and after high water events from USACE. State assistance to meet new federal standards ensures communities remain resilient and response to flood risk.

As you prepare your budget for the 2017-19 biennium, please keep in mind the value of levees across Oregon's landscape. Investing in this risk reduction infrastructure is an investment in our state's resilience: it strengthens our state's economy in the present and prevents disastrous flood damage in the future. We urge your strong support for the Business Oregon's Infrastructure Finance Authority \$10 million budget request for levee infrastructure.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Corky Collier'.

Corky Collier  
Executive Director