



The Ohio Fair Managers Association

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Chairman Jordan, Vice Chair Eklund, Ranking Member Gentile, and members of the General Government Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify to today regarding House Bill 64. My name is Robert Dawson, and I am testifying in support of the House added appropriation for county agricultural societies on behalf of the Ohio Fair Managers Association.

I have served on the Lake County Fair Board for over 35 years. I have been on the Board of the Ohio Fair Managers Association for 18 years, the last 12 of which I have served as Treasurer of the Association.

The Ohio Fair Manager's Association (OFMA) represents the 94 county and independent agricultural societies throughout the great state of Ohio. We are proud of the work we do to ensure that the traditions of the fairs continue for generation to come. The value that comes from Ohio's county and independent fairs is far more than what can be listed. Everything that our societies do, we do to promote the great industry of agriculture, the State's largest industry.

On behalf of the OFMA, I want to offer our strong support of the language included in Substitute House Bill 64 that, if enacted, would drastically help assist and promote our fairs. The appropriation added in the substitute bill will provide access to much need resources to all county and independent fairs.

Every fair, no matter the size, offers something unique to their communities. They provide a showcase for 4-H participants and other youth activities. Fair also provide an opportunity for families to do fun things together, like play carnival games and ride a Ferris wheel.

While the county agriculture societies do an excellent job providing this event for their communities, most fairgrounds are in great need of investment. Building and grounds maintenance are very expensive, and fairs operate on very thin margins. "Surplus" is not a word you hear often from Fair Boards.

The Director of Agriculture recently asked the Ohio Fair Managers Association to collect maintenance and capital needs from Ohio's fairs. Using a five year planning format, the fairs identified total infrastructure requirements of \$77 million dollars with \$44 million dollars being categorized as 1st priority needs.

Most fairgrounds have 40-50 structures with roofs. On average each fair is required to replace one to two roofs a year. Lake County, for example, is estimated to be \$200,000 behind on roof replacements. Aged mechanical infrastructures are sorely in need of significant repair or upgrading on many fairgrounds. These items can be sleeping giants to public safety. As a result of increasing regulations to areas such as water, sewer and electric most infrastructure repairs lead to expensive upgrades.

The loss of local government funds over the past few years has severely limited the County Commissioners ability to financially assist with fairgrounds maintenance and required upgrades. Support from the state will go a long way and be very appreciated by the OFMA and our members.

OFMA stands ready to work collaboratively and support the initiatives in Substitute HB 64 as it moves through the process. We are already working with our membership to gather grounds maintenance and improvement needs, so the distribution of the funds through the Ohio Department of Agriculture can be as seamless as possible.

Again, thank you for recognizing the value of county agricultural societies. I would be happy to answer any questions.