



March 6, 2026

The Honorable Jesse Gabriel, Chair
Assembly Committee on Budget
1021 O Street, Suite 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable David Tangipa, Vice Chair
Assembly Committee on Budget
1021 O Street, Suite 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Steve Bennett, Chair
Assembly Committee on Budget
Subcommittee No. 4
1021 O Street, Suite 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: FY 2026-27 Budget Request for Deferred Maintenance at State-Designated Fairgrounds

Dear Chair Gabriel, Vice Chair Tangipa, and Chair Bennett,

I respectfully request the inclusion of \$10 million General Fund in the 2026–27 Budget Act, to be allocated to the Fairs and Expositions Fund within the California Department of Food and Agriculture, to address critical deferred maintenance needs within California's network of state-designated fairgrounds.

California's network of state-designated fairs includes 77 fairgrounds operating under several governance structures. Of these, 52 are District Agricultural Associations (state entities within the Department of Food and Agriculture), 19 are county-operated fairs or county event centers, and 6 are operated by nonprofit entities pursuant to state designation. Collectively, these facilities comprise 5,744 acres of public-serving land and serve as year-round community venues supporting agricultural exhibitions, local events, workforce development activities, and regional gatherings.

Beyond community events, fairgrounds serve as critical components of California's emergency response and resiliency framework. In 2024 alone, fairgrounds were activated for 352 days to support disaster and large-scale response operations, housing approximately 30,000 emergency personnel and sheltering 2,000 animals. These facilities regularly operate as wildfire basecamps, evacuation shelters, and logistics

staging areas, providing the space, utilities, and coordination capacity necessary when communities face emergencies.

When fairgrounds are activated for emergency response operations, the state often incurs significant costs to bring in temporary infrastructure, including portable restrooms, mobile shower units, temporary Wi-Fi systems, air-conditioned trailers, and portable kitchen facilities. While these resources are essential during disasters, repeated reliance on temporary solutions results in substantial one-time expenditures. A more forward-looking approach would ensure that fairgrounds are equipped with the core infrastructure necessary to support emergency operations on site. Strategic investments in permanent utilities, connectivity, power capacity, and support facilities would require upfront funding but could significantly reduce recurring emergency response costs over time while improving operational efficiency and readiness.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture has identified significant deferred maintenance needs for fairgrounds in California. As of September 2022, prioritized deferred maintenance projects were estimated at approximately \$253 million. This figure reflects prioritized projects and does not represent a comprehensive inventory of all infrastructure needs across the more than 370 facilities in the system. Many facilities require modernization of aging electrical, water, and structural systems, as well as Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance upgrades and other life-safety improvements necessary to ensure safe public access and continued emergency functionality.

While we recognize the seriousness of the State's current fiscal constraints, the growing deferred maintenance backlog places both public safety readiness and economic activity at risk. Fairgrounds are significant contributors to California's economy, generating approximately \$2.57 billion in direct spending and \$5.64 billion in total economic impact annually, including \$182.9 million in annual sales tax revenue. Maintaining the infrastructure that supports this activity represents a prudent investment in both public safety and regional economic stability.

A \$10 million allocation would represent a meaningful step toward stabilizing priority deferred maintenance projects while the Legislature and Administration continue evaluating long-term infrastructure funding strategies for California fairgrounds.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and for your continued leadership in maintaining California's critical public infrastructure.

Sincerely,



HEATHER HADWICK

Assemblymember, 1st District