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December 6, 2021

On behalf of the Michigan Association of Fairs & Exhibitions, we would like to support SB 396, 397, 398, and 399 as they create advancements in the horse racing industry.

Fairs and horse racing have a long history in Michigan. The County Fairs are an important part of the strong tradition of horse racing in this state. County fairs provide training facilities and racing opportunities for young and inexperienced horses and drivers. Basically the fairs are the minor leagues of harness racing and provide opportunities to develop and prepare horses for pari-mutuel competition.

These bills increase certain funding caps initiated by the Horse Racing Law within the Agricultural Equine Development Fund that have not increased since the 1960s. They also allow for an increase in training and stabling funds available for fairs with racing and building improvements for all county fairs.

In many rural areas of our state the production and training of horses is a significant portion of the local economy. It provides employment for farmers, caretakers, veterinarians, farriers, etc. and year round markets for hay and grain; and horse interests pay taxes to local communities on breeding and training facilities. The horse racing industry in Michigan employs over 12,000 people.

In addition to helping fairs with racing, funding directed to the Agriculture Equine fund will help all fairs in the state. County and community fairs in Michigan will receive funding for vital capital improvements to help improve their grounds to better serve their communities. These grant funds have helped make numerous improvements at fairgrounds across the state. It has allowed fairgrounds to continue to meet the needs of their local areas.

Many people think fairgrounds only operate for the week of the fair. While the fair is an important event on the fairgrounds, it is necessary to note that fairgrounds are community centers. They drive tourism year-round that help small businesses grow and provide more opportunities for economic development and event recruitment. Some events bringing people to the area for several months of the year, or even year-round, include horse shows, car shows, weddings, swap meets, antique festivals, trade shows, and much more. Fairgrounds are a logical place for a wide variety of community events. In a normal year we would see nearly 4.5 million attendees at our Michigan fairs and another 3 million at these other events hosted at local fairgrounds.

Not only are fairs hosting these fun activities, but they are also a vital part of their community. Fairgrounds are often called upon for emergency service efforts, staging and in times of a pandemic; this

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past year we have seen fairgrounds serve as drive-up testing facilities, vaccination sites, and drive-up food pantries to help people in need. Even when fairgrounds are dormant in the winter, many provide a valuable service to their communities by storing personal boats, cars, and campers to earn revenue to operate their facilities.

Being able to operate and host events year-round allows our fairs, as private non-profit entities, to help their communities and the youth who participate. Other non-profit groups often partner with fairs such as 4-H, FFA, Lions Clubs, Rotary, marching bands, or school sports teams participating at the fair to help their own organizations raise money. Participation could be parking cars, hosting bingo, selling raffle tickets, running food booths, and more.

Thank you for your past and continued support of the Michigan fair and horse racing industries.

John Currie
Michigan Association of Fairs & Exhibitions
Horse Racing Committee Chair