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6 **IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE STATE OF OREGON**
7 **FOR THE COUNTY OF CROOK**
8

9 JUSTIN ALDERMAN, an individual,)
10 Plaintiff,) Case No. 26CV36185
11 vs.)
12 CROOK COUNTY, OREGON;) **COMPLAINT — VIOLATIONS OF ORS**
13 GAIL MERRITT, a Crook County Fair Board) CHAPTER 192 (Oregon Public Meetings Law)
14 Member;) **DECLARATORY & INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**
15 CASEY KAISER, a Crook County Fair Board)
16 Member; and)
17 LARRY BLANTON, a Crook County Fair)
18 Board Member;) (NOT SUBJECT TO MANDATORY
19 Defendant(s),) ARBITRATION)
20 _____)

21 Plaintiff alleges the following:

22 **Introduction**

23 **1.**

24 Oregon's Public Meetings Law reflects the Legislature's policy that the deliberations and decisions of public bodies be conducted openly so that the public may remain informed about the conduct of government. This action seeks declaratory and injunctive relief to address continuing violations of Oregon Public Meetings Law by the Crook County Fair Board, including failures to provide legally sufficient notice of meetings, identify the principal subjects anticipated to be

1 considered, maintain required meeting records, and otherwise comply with ORS 192.610 through ORS
2 192.705.

3 **2.**

4 This action does not arise in isolation. During late 2024, Plaintiff raised concerns in his
5 reporting published by the Prineville Review regarding the Fair Board's compliance with Oregon
6 Public Meetings Law in connection with executive sessions in reviewing applicants for its own Board,
7 and Crook County subsequently acknowledged violations of the law. The matter included intervention
8 by the Crook County Board of Commissioners, who provided direction to the Fair Board, which the
9 Fair Board initially sought to reject. Plaintiff alleges that, despite those acknowledged violations, the
10 Fair Board has continued to disregard core requirements of Oregon's Public Meetings Law, including
11 those governing public notice, transparency, and recordkeeping. Plaintiff therefore seeks prospective
12 declaratory and injunctive relief to ensure future compliance with Oregon law for the benefit of both
13 Plaintiff, as a representative of the news media and interested person, and the public at large.

14
15 **Venue & Parties**

16 **3.**

17 Defendant Crook County ("County") is a political subdivision of the State of Oregon
18 organized and existing under the laws of the State of Oregon. The County is a "public body" as defined
19 by ORS 192.610. The County conducts business in Crook County, Oregon, and its principal offices are
20 located at 300 NE Court Street, Prineville, Oregon 97754.

21 **4.**

22 The Crook County Fair Board ("Fair Board") is the governing body responsible for the
23 operation and management of the Crook County Fairgrounds pursuant to ORS Chapter 565. At all
24 times relevant to this Complaint, the Fair Board and any of its subcommittees, including the Funding
25 Information subcommittee ("Funding Committee" alleged herein, were governing bodies of Crook

1 County and a "governing body" subject to Oregon Public Meetings Law, ORS 192.610 et seq.

2 **5.**

3 At all material times mentioned herein, Justin Alderman ("Alderman") was a resident of the
4 State of Oregon and had frequently attended the Fair Board meetings. He also regularly conducts work
5 as a journalist, including but not limited to, in his capacity as a managing editor and investigative
6 reporter with Western Media Group, a news publication company which includes the online publication
7 the Prineville Review, a publication which has previously been reported on public scrutiny involving
8 Defendants and the Fair Board. He is a member of the Society of Professional Journalists.

9 **6.**

10 Venue is proper in Crook County because the events giving rise to this action occurred within
11 Crook County.

12 **7.**

13 As detailed below in this complaint, the Defendants violated ORS 192.610 to 192.705.

14 **Factual Background**

15 **8.**

16 Oregon Public Meetings Law requires that meetings of governing bodies be open to the public
17 unless expressly authorized otherwise by statute. ORS 192.630.

18 **9.**

19 ORS 192.640 requires governing bodies to provide reasonable public notice of meetings,
20 including the principal subjects anticipated to be considered.

21 **10.**

22 At all relevant times, at least a quorum of the Fair Board and Funding Committee members
23 knew of the legal requirements imposed by ORS 192.610 to 192.705, the Oregon Public Meetings Law
24 ("OPML").
25

11.

The Defendants have repeatedly acknowledged the obligation to comply with these transparency laws under ORS Chapter 192, as all three reported members of the Funding Committee have an extensive history of service in City & County government in the State of Oregon.

12.

In late 2024, following concerns raised by Plaintiff regarding the Fair Board's executive session practices, Crook County acknowledged that the Fair Board had violated provisions of Oregon Public Meetings Law relating to executive sessions and took corrective action.

13.

In late 2024, Plaintiff requested written notice of meetings of the Crook County Fair Board pursuant to ORS 192.640(1).

14.

At all relevant times, Defendants knew Plaintiff was both an interested person and a representative of the news media covering Fair Board activities.

15.

The public notice published on Defendants' official website (<https://crookcountyor.gov>) for the June 15th, 2026, regular meeting failed to identify the principal subjects anticipated to be considered as required by ORS 192.640(1). Instead, the notice merely listed generic categories including "Consent Agenda" and "Discussion Items" without identifying the actual matters anticipated to be discussed.

16.

Plaintiff, however, received a separate notice through his role with the Prineville Review containing a more detailed agenda for the June 15, 2026 meeting, demonstrating that Defendants had prepared a more complete description of the matters anticipated to be considered but failed to provide substantially the same information to the public through the official meeting notice.

1 **17.**

2 On April 20th, 2026, the Crook County Fair Board or its designee(s) formed a “Funding
3 Committee”, which, according to its own meeting minutes, described the committee as “Fair board
4 committee” that would consist of Defendants Casey Kaiser, Gail Merritt, and Larry Blanton.

5 **18.**

6 The April 20th, 2026, meeting minutes of the Fair Board further stated that the first meeting
7 of this Funding Committee would take place on May 7th, 2026.

8 **19.**

9 The meeting minutes also indicated that the May 7th, 2026, meeting of the Funding
10 Committee would include a discussion on “how money will be spent”.

11 **20.**

12 The meeting minutes for May 18th, 2026, and June 15th, 2026, meetings of the Fair Board
13 include agenda items for reports from the Funding Committee.

14 **21.**

15 Upon information and belief, the Funding Committee met on one or more occasions before its
16 anticipated reports for the May 18th, 2026, and June 15th, 2026, meetings of the Fair Board.

17 **22.**

18 Plaintiff searched the Fair Board and County’s official websites and publicly available records
19 but was unable to locate notices, agendas, minutes, recordings, or other records reflecting meetings of
20 the Funding Committee referenced throughout meeting minutes beginning in April 2026 of the Fair
21 Board.

22 **23.**

23 Plaintiff likewise received no notice of any Funding Committee meetings despite his standing
24 request for notice pursuant to ORS 192.640(1).

25 //

[illegible]

Upon information and belief, no public notice identifying the principal subjects anticipated to be considered was issued for any meetings of the Funding Committee.

25.

ORS 192.650 requires governing bodies to prepare written minutes or a sound, video, or digital recording of all meetings except executive sessions conducted pursuant to ORS 192.660(2)(e). Plaintiff has been unable to locate any minutes or recordings for the Funding Committee meetings.

26.

The Oregon Attorney General's Public Records and Meetings Manual explains that committees exercising delegated authority or making recommendations on behalf of a governing body may themselves constitute governing bodies subject to Oregon Public Meetings Law. The Funding Committee constituted a governing body under ORS 192.610; thus, its meetings were likewise subject to the notice and recordkeeping requirements of ORS 192.630 through ORS 192.650.

27.

As a result of Defendants' actions, Plaintiff and the public were deprived of the transparency required by Oregon Public Meetings Law.

Count 1 - Violations of ORS 192.640

(Notice of Meetings)

28.

Plaintiff realleges and incorporates paragraphs 1 through 27 as though fully set forth herein.

29.

ORS 192.640(1) requires governing bodies to provide reasonable notice of meetings, including notice of the principal subjects anticipated to be considered.

//

[illegible]

ORS 192.640(1) further requires that representatives of the news media and interested persons

31

Defendants failed to provide public notice reasonably identifying the principal subjects

32

Although Defendants had prepared a more detailed agenda for the June 15, 2026 meeting and

33

Upon information and belief, Defendants conducted one or more meetings of the Funding

34

Upon information and belief, Defendants failed to provide Plaintiff notice of one or more

35

Defendants' actions violated ORS 192.640

Count 2 - Violations of ORS 192.650

(Meeting Minutes)

36

Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 35 as though fully set

[illegible]

ORS 192.650 requires governing bodies to prepare written minutes or a sound, video, or digital recording of every meeting, except as otherwise provided by law.

38.

Upon information and belief, the Funding Committee conducted one or more meetings concerning Fair Board business.

39.

Plaintiff searched the Fair Board's official website and other publicly available records but was unable to locate any minutes, recordings, or other official records documenting those meetings.

40.

Upon information and belief, Defendants failed to prepare the minutes or recordings required by ORS 192.650 or, alternatively, failed to retain or make those records available as required by law for the Fair Board's Funding Committee.

41.

Defendants' actions violated ORS 192.650.

Count 3 - Violations of ORS 192.670

(Meetings by Telephone or Electronic Communication)

42.

Plaintiff realleges and incorporates by reference paragraphs 1 through 41 as though fully set forth herein.

43.

Any meetings of the Funding Committee were not conducted in whole or in part through telephone, Zoom, or other electronic communication.

//

1 **44.**

2 ORS 192.670 requires that meetings conducted through telephone or electronic
3 communication remain open to the public and that members of the public be afforded a means of
4 contemporaneously listening to, or where applicable observing, the meeting.

5 **45.**

6 Upon information and belief, Defendants failed to comply with one or more requirements of
7 ORS 192.670 with respect to meetings required to be conducted through electronic communication.

8 **46.**

9 Defendants' actions violated ORS 192.670.

10
11
12 WHEREFORE, Plaintiff respectfully requests that this Court:

13
14 (A) Declare that Defendants violated Oregon Public Meetings Law.

15 (B) Declare that the notice published for the June 15, 2026, Fair Board meeting failed to satisfy the
16 requirements of ORS 192.640(1).

17 (C) Declare that the Funding Committee constituted a governing body under ORS 192.610, and its
18 meetings were subject to the Oregon Public Meetings Law.

19 (D) Declare that the holding of any meetings of the Funding Committee constituted violations of
20 ORS 192.640(1), ORS 192.650, and ORS 192.670.

21 (E) Permanently enjoin Defendants and their Fair Board and any subcommittee thereof, including
22 the Funding Committee, from conducting future meetings in violation of ORS 192.610 through
23 ORS 192.705, including the notice requirements of ORS 192.640, the recordkeeping
24 requirements of ORS 192.650, the remote access requirements of ORS 192.670, and applicable
25 Oregon Administrative Rules.

1 (F) Order that all current members of the Crook County Fair Board and any of its subcommittees,
2 together with all Crook County employees or officials who regularly participate in the
3 administration, preparation, notice, or conduct of Fair Board meetings, complete or
4 re-complete the Oregon Government Ethics Commission's Public Meetings Law training
5 established pursuant to ORS 192.700 within sixty (60) days of entry of judgment, unless such
6 individual demonstrates that he or she has completed the same training during the pendency of
7 this action. Defendants shall file with the Court and serve upon Plaintiff documentation
8 sufficient to demonstrate compliance with this requirement.

9 (G) Should the Court find that a violation of ORS 192.610 through ORS 192.705 was the result of
10 intentional disregard of the law or willful misconduct by any member or members of a
11 governing body, as outlined in ORS 192.680(3) and (4), order that they be liable to the
12 governing body or public body for its legal expenses in defending this complaint.

13 (H) Award Plaintiff his costs and disbursements incurred in this action, together with reasonable
14 attorney fees as authorized by ORS 192.680(3), to the extent Plaintiff is represented or
15 supported by counsel or otherwise entitled to such an award under applicable law.

16 (I) Grant such other and further relief as the Court deems just and equitable.
17

18 RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED this 14th day of July, 2026.
19

20 */s/ Justin Alderman*

21 _____
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