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NEWS RELEASE

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AS RESCUERS SEEK TO SAVE CHILDREN IN COLLAPSED MEXICO CITY SCHOOL, COURTNEY URGES OREGON DISTRICTS TO SEEK GRANTS

(SALEM) – Senate President Peter Courtney Thursday urged Oregon school leaders to take the steps necessary to improve the seismic safety of their school buildings after a magnitude 7.1 quake toppled a primary school in Mexico City Tuesday.

Those steps, Courtney said, could include seeking a state grant to fund structural improvements of school buildings across the state. The Oregon Business Development Department will open the application period for the next round of Seismic Rehabilitation Grants Oct. 2.

“Often it is a tragedy that convinces us what we must do to prevent a tragedy,” Courtney said. “We know a massive earthquake is coming. We know we’re not ready. We still have far too many schools in our state that need to be reinforced. We got a late start and we are living on borrowed time. Not taking action to make our schools and other public buildings safe is criminal.”

Mexican officials have confirmed that 30 children were killed when a three-story wing of the Enrique Rebsamen school in southern Mexico City collapsed. Thursday, officials said five children and adults believed to have been in the school at the time of the earthquake are still missing.

In the 2017 session, lawmakers approved \$100 million in bonding authority to fund grants for seismic improvements at Oregon schools. To date the program has awarded more than \$209 million to fund grants to make 178 schools safer in the event of an earthquake – \$175 million of in the last two years.

Courtney, who has sponsored a dozen seismic safety measures which have become law, led the creation of the grant program in 2005 and won approval of in the last two biennial budgets of more than \$300 million in seismic rehabilitation grant funds.

Last week, Business Oregon, the state agency that oversees the grant program, hosted a training seminar for school officials. The training focused on the program's engineering feasibility study requirements and the cost benefit analysis process included as one of the elements in determining which projects are awarded grants. More than 50 people attended the seminar.

The application period for the next round of grants opens October 2 and the deadline for submittal is January 31, 2018. A total of \$35 million in grants is included in the next round -- \$25 million for schools and \$10 million for emergency services facilities. Grant awards are expected to be announced in April.

Business Oregon officials anticipate accepting another round of applications in fall 2018 for \$75 million in grants to be awarded in spring 2019. School officials who want more information about the program can contact Gloria Zacharias at Business Oregon (503) 986-0132.