

INTRODUCTION

Oregon's 1995 Budget Accountability Act (the Act) requires the governor, with the assistance of the Department of Revenue and the Department of Administrative Services, to produce a tax expenditure report every biennium, along with the Governor's Budget. The report was first prepared in 1996 for the 1997–99 biennium. This report covers tax expenditures for the 2017–19 biennium.

Tax Expenditure Defined

The Act defines a tax expenditure as:

any law of the Federal Government or of this state that exempts, in whole or in part, certain persons, income, goods, services, or property from the impact of established taxes, including, but not limited to tax deductions, tax exclusions, tax subtractions, tax exemptions, tax deferrals, preferential tax rates, and tax credits.

The term “tax expenditure” derives from the parallel between these tax provisions and direct government expenditures. For example, a program to encourage businesses to purchase pollution abatement equipment could be structured with an incentive in the form of a tax credit or a direct payment by the state to businesses. Tax expenditures can be viewed as: (1) providing financial assistance to certain groups of taxpayers, (2) providing economic incentives that encourage specific taxpayer behavior, or (3) simplifying or reducing the costs of tax administration. While the third of these policy objectives eliminates inefficiencies within the tax code, the first two could be implemented with direct expenditures rather than tax expenditures.

This report describes 367 tax expenditures in 16 Oregon tax programs. Because tax expenditures impart special treatment to groups of taxpayers, it is necessary to begin with a clear definition of the “established” tax base from which that special treatment departs. Because there may be different opinions about the normal base for each tax, a description of the tax base for each of the 16 tax programs begins each chapter.

In some tax programs, an alternative tax or fee is imposed for recipients of a tax expenditure. In the interest of being comprehensive, this report includes all provisions involving tax relief from a specific tax, even if those taxpayers are subject to an alternative tax. The alternative taxes or fees paid are reported as *In Lieu* payments in the descriptive information for each tax expenditure.

Purpose of the Tax Expenditure Report

The Act declares the necessity of:

a review of the fairness and efficiency of all tax deductions, tax exclusions, tax subtractions, tax exemptions, tax deferrals, preferential tax rates, and tax credits. These types of tax expenditures are similar to direct government expenditures because they provide special benefits to favored individuals or businesses, and thus result in higher tax rates for all individuals...It is in the best interest of this state to have prepared a biennial report of tax expenditures that will allow the public and policy makers to identify and analyze tax expenditures and to periodically make criteria-based decisions on whether the expenditures should be continued. The tax expenditure report will allow tax expenditures to be debated in conjunction with on-line budgets and will result in the elimination of inefficient and inappropriate tax expenditures, resulting in greater accountability by state government and a lowering of the tax burden on all taxpayers.