

Chair Haas & Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Angie Onyewuchi, and I'm the President & CEO of Travel Salem, a regional destination management and marketing organization promoting Salem and the Mid-Willamette Valley. I'm here in opposition to Senate Bill 595. We oppose any legislation that would change dedicated allocations at the state and local levels that fund one of Oregon's strongest economic drivers and employers ... the tourism industry.

I appreciate the opportunity to come before you today to talk about how tourism is invaluable to local economies ... but more importantly, I'd like to speak to how sustainable funding for tourism promotion is the jet fuel behind our industry's success.

When I first came to Travel Salem, our budget was \$400k. Now, we have \$1.5m and are better positioned to compete. We rely on being nimble, dynamic and innovative ... and our regional and statewide partnerships allow us to leverage our limited budget. We work in concentric circles ... by leveraging our dollars and aligning our marketing efforts with the Willamette Valley Visitors Association and Travel Oregon. By putting our dollars hard to work side by side with our partners, we are able to accomplish more as a group than we ever could individually. Oregon's story is told through these layers. Marketing is an expensive endeavor and a function of reach and frequency. Meaning ... **how** many consumers can we reach with our message, and how many **times** can we reach them. We have to buy that reach and frequency. It's expensive to do it right ... and having stable funding creates the foundation for successful programs and ultimately, tangible ROI for Oregonians.

I've been doing this work for 12 years now ... and have witnessed first-hand how tourism is the front door to economic development. Eight years ago, we negotiated a deal with an event planner from New York to bring 15,000 delegates over three weekends ... he loved this community so much, he relocated his family here and established a West Coast headquarters right here in Salem. He's now planning to expand and add a second convention which will bring an additional 25,000 delegates.

We recruited and hosted a national BMW convention of 3,500 delegates, which resulted in 15 of these delegates purchasing Harley Davidson motorcycles from our local dealer and shipping them back home to all corners of the U.S.

Our downtown core is in the middle of a renaissance ... which started with building our award-winning convention center. This economic development project has triggered a burgeoning culinary scene, new retail ... and the recent groundbreaking of our new walking bridge that connects the largest inner-city park system in the United States. This has fueled diverse commercial development including downtown housing.

Our ability to market and promote the unique and special experiences that define this place ... results in broad-based benefits for the entire community. Three years ago, we secured additional lodging tax funds to launch a sports marketing program that has produced the best summers we've ever had with hotels being at sold out capacity 3 years in a row.

We also focus our marketing efforts on shoulder season business, to drive benefit when local businesses need it the most ... for our community, it's November to March each year and on the weekends when vacancy is higher. And I'm happy to report, we have had the most sold out weekends ever in the past 2 years.

Travel Salem recruited a new national high school basketball tournament in December that has grown in the last couple years to draw teams from across the country and more than 20,000 spectators. This event brings visitors into our market during the winter, and their dollars flow into all corners of our economy, turning over a minimum of 7 times.

This type of activity doesn't just happen ... as tourism marketing professionals, we have to make it happen through smart branding, compelling storytelling and expert marketing strategies. We're in the inspiration business – positioning our community as the destination of choice – and getting visitors to say “Yes” to Oregon. To choose Oregon. That's our job.

Our lodging facilities, large and small, have all stood up ... as private sector businesses ... and agreed to tax themselves to fund the tourism engine. They had a vision of sustainable funding for tourism promotion that would ultimately ensure their long-term success. But it wasn't simply about putting heads in beds, but a "rising tide" philosophy at its heart. They wanted the communities they work in to be healthy and strong for the employees that work for them. Yes, the lodging folks definitely win when tourism promotion is doing its job, but they also know that the entire tourism ecosystem and community at large wins as well. We should all be thankful for their vision and investment in Oregon that goes far beyond the bricks and mortar.

A healthy tourism engine is critical to a healthy Oregon. Here in Salem, I'm not just competing with other Oregon destinations ... but I'm competing with London, Rome, Cape Town, Singapore and everywhere in between. If Oregon wants to remain competitive, we have to protect our tourism promotion funding, so we can continue to tell our story and stand out in the competitive landscape.

It takes a village, a city, a county, a beautiful Oregon to come together and stand behind our vision for sustainable funding that fuels our tourism ecosystem. That ecosystem is comprised of citizens who are our most important ambassadors selling Oregon's charm and authenticity, our businesses who pour their heart into unique products and experiences, and you ... our policy leaders who set the tone for a thriving tourism economy and smartly reinvesting tourism dollars to deliver the highest and best use of those limited funds. We are your partners in tourism economic development and through your dedicated investment in tourism, Oregon stands strong.

Thank you for your time.