

Coastal Mayors Coalition

February 26, 2024

Chair Kropf and Committee Members:

The Coastal Mayors Coalition urges you to support and recommend for passage SB 1576 — specifically the portions pertaining to restoration of recreational immunity.

Our coalition consists of the mayors of every town on the Oregon Coast and those within 12 miles of the coastline. By charter, we cannot take a public position unless there is unanimous consent of the membership. *Fields v. Newport* has provided a rallying cry for us all. We believe that while not a final fix, SB1576 represents the much-needed patch to restore recreational immunity for now.

Recreational immunity is the bedrock of protecting the public's access to what arguably makes Oregon so unique — its outdoors and its beaches. Oregon's Beach Bill requires that access to work. At no time was this more evident than during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this unprecedented period, outdoor recreation was one of the few remaining options for diversion and became vital for mental and physical health. Many of our cities closed to visitors, but as our cities opened up again, we saw a dramatic rebirth of in-state and regional tourism. Recreation continues to be king for our cities. Without restoration of recreational immunity, we must either choose to close our trails and outdoor recreational facilities, or keep amenities open and await being sued. The second option is nearly impossible, due to skyrocketing insurance costs — or becoming uninsurable altogether. It is no secret that the largest insurance pool for municipalities (CIS) has recommended communities close their trails.

Added risk for cities is only a win for individuals filing suit and their attorneys. As mayors, we feel the intent of the statute must be made abundantly clear to the courts: Free public accesses are for recreation, regardless of the specific intent of the user. This law provides us the necessary cover to affordably insure and support trails and other recreational facilities in our communities.

Please vote yes on SB 1576 as amended.

Thank you,

Henry A. Balensifer III, Mayor of Warrenton
Convener
Coastal Mayors Coalition

Astoria – Warrenton – Gearhart – Seaside – Cannon Beach – Manzanita – Nehalem – Wheeler –
Rockaway Beach – Garibaldi – Bay City – Tillamook – Lincoln City – Depoe Bay – Siletz – Newport –
Toledo – Waldport – Yachats – Florence – Dunes City – Reedsport – Lakeside – North Bend – Coos Bay –
Bandon – Port Orford – Gold Beach – Brookings