



**Re:** Testimony in Support of HB 2977

Good morning, Chairs Helm and Owens, and members of this committee.

My name is Erin Sito. I am an out-of-stater and organization leader supporting HB 2977. I *love* Oregon and visit several times a year to see family, friends, and conduct business. I lived here for six years before moving east for my role as U.S. Public Policy Director for Wildlands Network. Working on both state and federal conservation issues, it must be said that, now more than ever, States *must* be able to step up and provide resources for wildlife conservation in light of the current instability of support from the federal level.

I've supported increasing the transient Lodging tax (TLT) for conservation since my time in Oregon. I have also heard the tourism industry's prevailing concern regarding Oregon's ability to remain competitive in attracting conventions and business travel. I certainly wouldn't want to jeopardize Oregon's tourism economy in any way. That said, when I compare Oregon's TLT to other states, and I talk to for-profit professionals who travel often for large conventions, it seems as though the TLT is not as critical a factor when determining where to hold conventions and conferences.

Planners consider many factors when choosing a city, including the centrality of the city for folks traveling, the year-round weather, walkability and safety, and the city's attractions and nightlife. I personally and professionally do not consider the TLT when I choose Oregon. I choose Oregon because of how beautiful the state is and how much I, and others in my field, love visiting wild places and having the chance to see wildlife I would not get to see where I live.

From the for-profit perspective, a friend of mine in the natural foods industry, who used to travel to Portland quite frequently for the UNFI trade shows among others, confirmed that they also do not consider the TLT when traveling because they simply write off the cost as a business expense. They also added that, for them, knowing that their money would be spent on efforts that sustain the local environment would actually be a positive deciding factor, as it aligns with their industry's ethos.

Oregon has one of the lowest TLTs in the country and no sales tax, yet none of its cities are in the top 25 for conventions. The [top 25 cities](#) are actually located in states with higher state TLTs, the highest being 14.5% in Washington D.C., and the average across all these states being roughly 3% (3.12%). When you factor in the additional applicable sales tax to those states, that average total tax becomes at least 5.25%. These numbers are inconsistent with the statements made about planners flocking to low tax states. Most importantly, these numbers show that, even if the TLT were a major deciding factor, an increase in Oregon's TLT to 2.5 percent would still make it competitive when compared to other states most popular for holding conventions.

Each time this idea is brought to the legislature, we hear more reasons why people visit and do business here, with natural beauty being a key factor. I urge this committee to pass HB 2977, as failing to invest more in preserving this beauty will hurt Oregon's competitiveness in tourism and business travel over time.

Sincerely,

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