

Submitter: Sara Rose

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3556

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed bill that allows for more flexibility in the spending of money from our tourist tax. As a resident of Central Oregon, I have witnessed firsthand the significant impact that tourism has had on our community, particularly in terms of the degradation of our public lands, overcrowded trails, and the housing crisis exacerbated by the proliferation of vacation rentals. Our public lands have seen a dramatic increase in visitation, with Oregon State Parks experiencing record-breaking numbers, reaching nearly 53.85 million visits last year. While this influx of visitors highlights the natural beauty and appeal of our region, it also places immense strain on our trails and natural resources. Overuse has led to erosion, habitat destruction, and a decline in the overall quality of our outdoor spaces. Additionally, the crowded trails have become a safety concern and detract from the experience that both residents and visitors seek when exploring our beautiful landscapes. The increased foot traffic not only damages the trails but also disrupts wildlife and contributes to littering and pollution. Another pressing issue is the well-known problem of vacation rentals. The rise of short-term rentals has significantly contributed to the housing crisis in Central Oregon. Many properties that could serve as long-term residences for local families are instead being converted into vacation rentals, driving up housing costs and reducing the availability of affordable housing. This trend is unsustainable and detrimental to the fabric of our community. Given these challenges, it is my firm belief that Visit Bend does not need to allocate additional funds from the tourist tax to attract more visitors to our region. We already receive a substantial number of tourists, and the focus should instead be on managing the existing influx and mitigating its negative impacts. Visit Bend's current initiatives, such as the Bend Sustainability Fund, have already demonstrated a commitment to supporting local projects that enhance and protect our community. Redirecting funds towards sustainable tourism practices and community support will ensure that Central Oregon remains a vibrant and livable place for residents while still welcoming visitors. In conclusion, I urge you to support this bill and advocate for the responsible and flexible use of tourist tax funds. By prioritizing the preservation of our public lands, addressing the housing crisis, and focusing on sustainable tourism, we can create a balanced approach that benefits both residents and visitors alike. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.