

Submitter: Dana Gould

On Behalf Of:

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

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3556

RE: Request to Move House Bill 3556 to the House Committee on Revenue Without Recommendation

Chair Tran, Vice-Chairs Grayber and Lewis, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to share my personal perspective on the negative impact the State's current transient lodging tax (TLT) disbursement formula has on the City of Gearhart. Gearhart is a small city occupying less than 2 square miles on the Oregon Coast. There are a number of reasons why the City has established a Comprehensive Plan that discourages tourism and it has adopted an ordinance which severely restricts short term rentals within its borders. The City and its voters are committed to protecting the sensitive coastal environment in which we live, but we are also motivated by practical concerns directly related to the health and safety of residents and visitors. The significant income generated in the tourism friendly communities on my city's borders negatively impacts my community. The efforts to promote tourism in Clatsop County are very successful. An overflow of visitors enter Gearhart via the 101 Hwy and the state beaches and often remain here. These tourists place unsustainable demands on the City of Gearhart's resources.

Gearhart relies on a volunteer fire department and 3 full time police officers to provide emergency services. Recently we began a limited contract with the Clatsop County Sheriff's Department to fill service gaps. We have only 4 public works employees. Our staff work very hard, but still struggle to keep up with the demands of the influx of visitors who are attracted to the State's Park beach land on our western border in warmer months. During peak holiday time periods, our volunteers and employees are compelled to fill the gaps in services caused by the State's failure to commit resources proportionate to the problems caused by thousands of tourists on the beach. This is particularly true during peak holiday periods like Independence Day. The increase in litter and vehicles driving unchallenged in protected areas on the beach have a negative impact on the environment. Voters in my community have voiced relevant and realistic safety concerns raised by intoxicated crowds of people lighting off illegal fireworks for weeks surrounding this holiday. It is my understanding the State only assigns 5 officers to patrol these concert sized crowds, and I have yet to see any type of State fire response on a holiday weekend. It seems very irresponsible for the State to continue to use money to attract crowds while abdicating responsibility for their safety. That burden falls on the local jurisdictions.

The City of Gearhart has a limited water supply. During summer months, Gearhart must purchase water from the City of Warrenton. This situation is fast becoming untenable as it hinders both Gearhart's and Warrenton's ability to meet future building goals. The City of Seaside (on our southern border) faces its own limitations and may only provide additional to water to Gearhart in an emergency. It is not reasonable to promote tourism that impacts all Cities in the County, when some cities are struggling to provide enough water for residents.

It is my belief the current TLT disbursement system will soon force my small city to consider changes to its culture and identity that would be unwelcome to the voters and unhealthy for the environment. Money raised in other communities should not work against a small city like mine, that is doing everything it can to be fiscally responsible for its residents. Gearhart should not be compelled to raise its residents' taxes to build infrastructure and increase services to address a tourism overflow problem it did not want or encourage. This seems inconsistent with the home rule theory that is part and parcel of Oregon's political system.

I support House Bill 3556, in that it would give small cities like mine some hope of ensuring the ongoing safety and infrastructure needs of our residents and visitors are met.