

House Committee on Revenue

In Support of HB 3962-2

Chair Nathanson and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

As a Tillamook County Commissioner serving in a rural coastal county with maximal tourism impacts, I implore you to support the passage of HB 3962-2, allowing flexibility in the use of transient lodging tax (TLT) revenues for public safety and infrastructure.

As a tourism destination, we value and embrace tourism as an economic driver. But we do not need to spend 70 percent of TLT on tourism promotion and facilities; the visitors are already coming. In 2023 over 1 million people visited the Tillamook Creamery; however, our Sheriff's Office is funded by property taxes for a population of 28,000.

Given declining state timber revenues due to the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), we are balancing our general fund budget with our savings account, providing the public safety services that visitors need when they are here. At the same time, we bring in \$5.25 million annually that must be spent on tourism promotion and facilities (\$5.25 million is 70 percent of our \$7.5 million annual TLT revenue). The equation is out of balance.

As liaison to the emergency management department, I am proud to report that emergency preparedness efforts on the North Oregon coast are without parallel. Our communities are doing outstanding, heroic work with very little funding, to be as prepared as we can be for "the big one," a Cascadia subduction zone earthquake and subsequent tsunami. But make no mistake, if that happens in the summertime when there are 100,000 visitors here, there is no way we will have enough food, shelter and emergency supplies for our guests. That responsibility weighs on us like stones.

As a commissioner I would like to speak up for the small cities in our county that are also struggling or unable to pay for public safety and infrastructure needs. Please give us the flexibility to use TLT funds to pay for the things that we need to take care of our visitors.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Mary Faith Bell, Tillamook County Commissioner