

Submitter: Joseph Smoot
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1517

Thank you for reviewing my testimony.

I ask you to oppose SB1517 and instead support SB1593.

Oregon is facing a growing crisis related to excessive liability litigation in outdoor recreation. Over the past two decades, liability insurance premiums for outdoor recreation providers in Oregon have risen far out of proportion to those in other states. This has had serious consequences, most visibly among Oregon's ski resorts, where several insurers have chosen to stop operating in the state altogether due to the legal environment.

However, this issue extends far beyond large resorts. I am a member of several Mt. Hood-based skiing organizations that provide public racing and recreational opportunities. In order to partner with ski resorts and responsibly protect our organizations, we are required to carry liability insurance. Our premiums have risen sharply as well, and we have been forced to cancel or abandon proposed activities due solely to liability concerns—concerns that would not exist in most other states.

One clear example is the 90 lb Rucksack Challenge, a memorial event honoring the 10th Mountain Division's assault on Riva Ridge during World War II. This nationwide event was planned to include a Mt. Hood component last year to commemorate the 80th anniversary. The Oregon portion was cancelled for one reason only: liability exposure. No other state faced this barrier.

This problem is not limited to skiing. It affects outdoor recreation across Oregon—one of the defining elements of our state's identity and economy.

SB1517 offers a narrower and incomplete approach that leaves significant gaps unaddressed. Specifically it only covers ski resort operators, not the many other organizations or activities affected by this problem. While it may appear to be a compromise, it fails to resolve the underlying problem and risks creating the appearance of progress without delivering meaningful change. SB1593/HB4071, by contrast, would bring Oregon in line with other states and allow the outdoor activities our state is known for to continue responsibly and sustainably. SB1517 will not.

I respectfully ask that you support SB1593/HB4071 and oppose SB1517 in its current form. Thank you for your time and consideration.