

Submitter: Mark Labhart
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Revenue
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4134
Subject

Chair Nathanson, Vice-Chairs Reschke and Walters, and Members of the House Revenue Committee,

My name is Mark Labhart. I served for 12 years as a Tillamook County Commissioner, and I appreciate the opportunity to share a perspective that may be helpful as you consider this bill.

You have received many letters both supporting and opposing this proposal. Rather than repeat the common arguments in favor, I would like to briefly address the concerns raised by the Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association (ORLA) and explain why those concerns do not align with the facts.

First, ORLA suggests that increasing the statewide lodging tax will result in a loss of conventions and visitors, particularly in Portland. Oregon's own data does not support this claim. Visitor volume continued to grow through multiple changes in the state lodging tax, including the increase in 2016. Other states that raised their lodging taxes—such as Montana and Vermont—also experienced continued growth in tourism, despite having significantly higher rates than Oregon today.

Second, there is concern that Portland will become non-competitive. This tax is not paid by businesses; it is paid by overnight visitors, most of whom are from out of state. Lodging providers already collect this tax and retain a portion of the revenue for administration. For the average hotel stay in Portland, the proposed increase amounts to roughly \$1–4 per night. It is highly unlikely that such a modest amount would determine whether someone attends a convention or vacations in Oregon.

Finally, some have raised the “camel’s nose under the tent” argument. That concern is understandable, but it is also fully within your control. This bipartisan bill has broad support from organizations representing thousands of Oregonians. Any future proposal would have to stand on its own merits and earn similar support.

This bill deserves your support because it reflects both the data and the will of a large portion of your constituents.

Respectfully,

Mark Labhart

Former Tillamook County Commissioner