

February 4, 2026

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Rusty Preston, and I am writing as the owner/operator of a small, family-owned business operating in rural Oregon. Like many rural businesses, our operation is deeply rooted in our local community, relies on seasonal and recreational activity, and operates on very thin margins. We do not have the legal or financial resources of large corporations, yet we face the same—and often greater—liability exposure.

The current legal environment in Oregon surrounding unenforceable liability waivers has already had a significant impact on our business and is becoming increasingly unsustainable. Rising insurance costs, shrinking coverage options, and growing legal uncertainty threaten not only our livelihood, but the continued operation of many small businesses and nonprofits across the state. For rural operators in particular, these pressures can be the difference between staying open and shutting down permanently.

SB 1517 addresses this liability issue only for ski areas, while leaving thousands of other small businesses and nonprofit organizations exposed to the same risks. Outfitters, guides, trail organizations, climbing gyms, bike parks, volunteer groups, and many other community-based organizations face identical liability challenges, yet SB 1517 does nothing to address their needs. This narrow approach creates an uneven playing field and fails to recognize the broader scope of the problem.

More concerning, SB 1517 distracts from and ignores the comprehensive solution offered through the ORCA2026 Act. I strongly support SB 1593 and HB 4701, which take a fair, inclusive approach to addressing liability protections for the full spectrum of outdoor recreation providers, volunteers, and organizations that contribute so much to Oregon's economy and quality of life—especially in rural communities.

I respectfully urge you to oppose SB 1517 and instead support SB 1593 and HB 4701. These bills recognize the realities faced by small, family-owned, rural operations and offer a balanced path forward that protects both participants and providers.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for your service to the people of Oregon.

Sincerely,  
Rusty Preston  
Small Business Owner