

Submitter: Clifford Agocs
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Commerce and General
Government
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1593

RE: SB 1593 SUPPORT

Chair Meek, Vice-Chair Drazan, and members of the committee,?

My name is Clifford Agocs and I am the owner of Timberline Mountain Guides, a Bend, Oregon-based guide service that has existed since 1983. We employ 25-30 guides each year and boast the most highly trained and certified staff of mountaineering, rock climbing and backcountry skiing guides in the state.

We guide the most demanding, technical climbs in the Pacific Northwest, including many thousands of summits of Mount Hood and Mount Rainier. In doing so, we take on known and foreseeable risks for the benefit of our guests. These risks are unavoidable in pursuit of our clients goals. As guides, our job is to manage these risks, but we cannot eliminate them completely. The ability to protect our company from litigation associated with the hazards that are inherent to the activity, is necessary for us to be able to operate these activities in the wild alpine areas of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.

Our guide service has been forced to increase prices alongside drastic increases in liability insurance. This makes these outdoor places and experiences less accessible to our residents, as well as travelers from all over the world.

Insurance premiums have also caused us to remove offerings in which we have the most expertise to offer. For example, people who would like to learn to lead rock climbing would be best served by learning from the experienced certified guides that we employ. However, in hiring us they must accept the added risk of injury which comes with learning this activity. Our service has had to remove this program from our offerings, after seeing multiple local guide service go out of business or be forced to sell after minor accidents lead to insurance premium increases that were unsustainable. This leads to a reduction of work for our employees and a diminishment of our public perception as an industry leader.

Small businesses like mine cannot keep up with the insurance premiums in Oregon, and cannot compete in states like Washington, where we offer services in the same locations as Washington-based guide services who do not have the same insurance costs underpinning their business.

I am requesting that you align Oregon's waiver policies with those of other Western States, where outdoor recreation is a major draw to out-of-state visitors and a major driver of revenue and employment in our rural regions. We support and appreciate The Explore Act of 2024.

Further economic studies will bear out both the importance of outdoor recreation in our region, and the value that a more common-sense liability environment would have on local recreation business, and the food and hospitality industries that benefit from associated visitation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Clifford Agocs, Bend, Oregon.