

Submitter: Samara Phelps
On Behalf Of: Travel Lane County
Committee: Senate Committee On Commerce and General Government
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1593

Chair Meek and members of the committee,

My name is Samara Phelps, and I serve as President and CEO of Travel Lane County. I am submitting testimony in support of SB 1593, with a particular emphasis on its importance to Oregon's rural communities.

Across Lane County and throughout Oregon, rural communities rely heavily on recreation as a driver of visitation, local employment and small-business vitality. Guided outdoor experiences, recreation-based events and access to natural assets are often among the primary reasons visitors travel to rural areas. When these businesses are unable to operate, the economic consequences are immediate and difficult to replace.

Today, many recreation providers are facing a growing liability insurance crisis. Rising premiums, shrinking coverage options and loss of insurability are already forcing some operators to scale back or consider closure. In rural communities, there are often no substitutes when a provider disappears. The loss of a single outfitter, guide or recreation business can ripple through lodging, food service and other visitor-dependent businesses.

SB 1593 is important because it begins to address the legal and market conditions contributing to this crisis. Oregon is increasingly out of alignment with peer western states that honor liability waivers for ordinary negligence. That misalignment places Oregon's recreation providers, particularly those in rural areas, at a competitive disadvantage and contributes directly to higher insurance costs and reduced access to coverage.

From the perspective of the visitor economy, the measure of success for this legislation must be whether it meaningfully stabilizes the recreational insurance market. If providers remain unable to secure affordable, reliable coverage, rural destinations will continue to lose experiences that draw visitors and sustain local economies.

I also urge the committee to continue work toward inclusion of parental waivers. Without addressing this gap, many providers will remain exposed to significant risk, limiting the effectiveness of the reform and leaving key rural recreation experiences vulnerable.

A strong visitor economy depends on recreation providers being able to operate safely, responsibly and sustainably. For rural communities in particular, SB 1593 represents an opportunity to preserve access, support local businesses and maintain the experiences that make Oregon a destination.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your consideration of this important issue.

Respectfully submitted,
Samara Phelps
President & CEO
Travel Lane County