

February 9, 2026

Dear Chair Nathanson, Vice Chair Reschke, Vice Chair Walters, and members of the House Committee on Revenue,

My name is Michelle Gietl and I am a long time Oregonian. I work in tourism and economic development. I appreciate the opportunity to convey my opposition to HB 4148.

In working at the Hood River County Chamber of Commerce, I support our economic development and sustainability.

We oppose HB 4148 because this bill was not developed with the established history of broad collaboration and inclusion of statewide DMO's and our industry partners. Honoring the commitments made to the industry in the 2003 and 2016 state Transient Lodging Tax (TLT) processes was absent in bringing HB 4148 to the short session. The result is poor policy and a shortsighted view of Oregon's long term economic health.

The tourism industry remains firmly committed to working as stewards of Oregon's future. Potential changes to TLT statute should be developed in partnership with the industry most directly affected by this tax. The local and regional TLT distributions established in 2003 should be honored and protected. If changes to TLT distributions are merited, they should only be considered on new or future TLT increases, not retroactively altering sacrosanct agreements.

Tourism is a major economic driver for Oregon, providing employment for more than 125,000 residents statewide. We are in a challenging economic climate, and it is essential we do not divert transient lodging tax revenue away from the very foundation that was originally established to support Oregon's economic recovery.

DMO's are responsible and accountable tourism professionals who generate millions of dollars in positive economic impacts for communities throughout Oregon. Oregon's DMOs do not use Tourism Promotion dollars to market to visitors during peak seasons. Instead, DMOs aim to attract visitors during non-peak travel periods through programs that increase occupancy in slower visitor months and help balance visitor volume across destinations. This strategy helps to even out the seasonality of tourism, ensuring year-round employment and healthy economies for local communities.

Tourism became foundational to Oregon's economy as a result of the Tourism Investment Proposal of 2003. This initiative led to the creation of Travel Oregon, established a dedicated funding source through the statewide transient lodging tax (TLT), and protected local funding investments in tourism.

During the 2003 recession, the Governor, working closely with the legislature and tourism leaders statewide, recognized tourism as an untapped market. Strategic and sustained investment in tourism was deemed essential by all partners to build Oregon's reputation as a desirable destination for both business and leisure travel.

Collaboration was a key element in this process. Collaboration was also key in 2016, when the statewide TLT was increased to invest in Oregon's hosting of the World Track & Field Championships, further establishing Eugene, Oregon as Track Town USA. This action helped to expand regional tourism investments and competitive grant programs for local communities across the state.

Since 2003, tourism has been essential in sustaining Oregon's workforce, economic viability, and quality of life for residents. Visitor spending in Oregon has more than doubled—from \$6.5 billion in 2003 to \$14.3 billion today. State and local transient lodging tax revenues have more than tripled, rising from \$200 million in 2003 to \$691 million today. Oregon has also experienced steady annual increases in spending, with all growth outpacing inflation.

The Regional Cooperative Tourism Program (RCTP), established in 2003, has facilitated numerous partnerships statewide. These collaborations span all seven tourism regions and have led to significant projects and initiatives.

For example, DMO's from across the state have implemented the following cutting-edge programs to support our local communities.

- Eastern Oregon: Efforts are underway to expand the Oregon Outback Dark Sky Sanctuary, develop new tourism opportunities in remote Southeastern Oregon, and capitalize on the growing demand for astro-tourism. Investments have also supported outdoor recreation in Wallowa County, the creation of the Joseph Branch Trail, and responsible recreation messaging in the Eagle Cap Wilderness.
- Central Oregon: Transient lodging tax funds, combined with local tourism resources, have helped create a Commercial Air Service Development and Marketing Fund. This fund provided the necessary match for a federal Small Community Air Service Development Program (SCASDP) grant, resulting in expanded commercial air service and new business development throughout the region.
- Portland Region: Partnership investments have supported convention sales through Portland's Visitor Development Fund and transformative local development projects. Initiatives include supporting culinary tourism, investing in local food producers and restaurants, and providing the first \$1 million gift to the James Beard

Public Market, establishing a world-class downtown destination for food enthusiasts from Portland and around the globe.

These examples highlight just a few of the many programs and successes. Current statute enables the creation of sustainable marketing and product development programs, which are especially critical for communities transitioning from resource-based economies to those that include tourism management and marketing.

Reducing or eliminating the momentum created by tourism investments would be detrimental to Oregon's long term economic health. Opposing HB 4148 is essential to ensure that tourism destinations and DMOs remain viable. Defeat HB 4148 and help us continue to strategically plan and invest in projects and partnerships that are vital to Oregon's economic future.

Thank you for supporting your tourism constituency as stewards of Oregon's natural wonders.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

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