

Con Testimony Against Oregon Senate Bill 1501

Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Paulita Peña. I'm a registered Republican, union leader, farm labor contractor, advocate, and state government employee. I fight every day for working people, not giveaways to wealthy interests. I also live with chronic health issues and invisible disabilities, so I know what it means to make hard choices about priorities, to work for my own health insurance, and to stretch every dollar to take care of my family.

I am here opposed to Senate Bill 1501, the bill that lays the groundwork for using public funding and diverted tax revenue to renovate the Moda Center.

Here's the truth: right now Oregon has serious budget problems, a structural gap that budget writers estimate at hundreds of millions of dollars. Yet lawmakers are considering setting up public financing for an arena renovation while basic services are under pressure, and while families across this state struggle with a high cost of living and rising housing costs.

The bill would allow the state to create an Oregon Arena Fund and potentially borrow against the state's general fund to pay for renovations tied to the Moda Center. Some revenues that would otherwise go into the general fund could be diverted into this special arena account based on income taxes paid by employers around the venue including the Trail Blazers and other businesses.

Let's be honest about the bigger picture:

This is public money for private gain.

The new billionaire ownership of the Trail Blazers isn't being asked to put meaningful money on the table for this renovation. The team stands to benefit immensely from a modern facility, yet the public is being asked to carry the risk and cost while wealthy owners capture much of the commercial value. There's no guarantee the team will stay long-term even with renovation incentives on the table.

Oregon's budget still has major holes.

We're planning cuts and grappling with a budget shortfall. Diverting tax dollars even if technically "reinvested" means less flexibility for schools, health care, public safety, mental health services, and infrastructure that working families actually rely on every day.

Wealthy Oregonians and corporations already avoid paying their fair share.

We know Oregon has millionaires and billionaires who use tax loopholes and offshore structures to reduce their state tax bills. Yet when it comes time to fund public needs, average working families are expected to carry the weight while the ultra-wealthy benefit from services and infrastructure they don't meaningfully invest in. Turning our already stressed tax base into a revenue stream for private arena upgrades is bad policy especially when everyday people are struggling to keep up with rent, childcare, groceries, and health care costs.

Portland families are already squeezed.

Portland has some of the highest costs of living in Oregon. Housing costs are skyrocketing. Wages aren't keeping up. Diverting revenue or borrowing against the state's general fund for a sports venue renovation only adds financial pressure when we should be strengthening affordable housing, stabilizing public services, and ensuring Oregon remains livable for working families.

We need transparency and priorities that match real needs.

SB 1501 doesn't appropriate money yet, but it sets a framework that could lock the state into decades of debt and diverted revenues for a project that benefits private ownership far more than the general public. Before we set up special funds, we should demand clear data on costs, net benefits to Oregon residents, and firm commitments from wealthy owners to shoulder their share.

We should be asking: *Why are we prioritizing a billionaire-backed sports facility over people struggling to get by?* Why is the public being asked to subsidize a project that does not directly improve basic life outcomes like education, health care, or housing stability for everyday Oregonians?

For these reasons to protect working families, to insist on fairness in tax contributions, and to keep our scarce public dollars focused on real community needs I urge you to oppose SB 1501.

Thank you.