

Dear Members of the Oregon Legislature,

I am writing as a concerned resident of Redmond, Oregon, to strongly oppose Senate Bill 1501, which would authorize the state to redirect taxpayer dollars toward the ownership and operation of the Moda Center in Portland. While the bill does not impose new taxes, it reallocates existing revenues from the General Fund to a new Oregon Arena Fund, potentially diverting millions annually to subsidize a private arena at the expense of critical public services. This is especially troubling given Oregon's pressing challenges in education, healthcare, and infrastructure, where funding shortfalls are already exacerbating crises. I urge you to reject this bill and prioritize the needs of all Oregonians over special interests.

SB 1501 would establish a joint authority for the state to negotiate ownership of the Moda Center, dedicating withheld personal income taxes from Rose Quarter-related wages and performer income to arena expenses, renovations, and operations. These transfers, starting in tax years after July 1, 2027, could amount to significant sums, backfilled from the General Fund without any new revenue sources. In essence, this creates an indirect subsidy for a sports and entertainment venue, tied to the presence of a professional basketball team, while Oregon grapples with budget constraints that threaten essential programs.

Oregon's public education system is in a state of decline, and diverting funds to an arena would only worsen this downturn. Our students are receiving far less instructional time than peers nationally—Oregon has one of the shortest school years and ranks third highest in chronic absenteeism, with over a third of students missing more than three weeks annually. This has led to abysmal performance: In 2024, only 31% of fourth graders were proficient in math, placing us below 38 other states, and we've fallen to #44 in overall K-12 quality. Despite record spending, districts face deep cuts due to declining enrollment (over 30,000 students lost in five years) and impending shortfalls exceeding \$115 million statewide. Proposals to overhaul the outdated Quality Education Model are underway, but with potential layoffs and program closures looming, we cannot afford to siphon resources away from classrooms to fund a Portland arena. Our children's futures depend on investing in education, not entertainment venues.

Equally alarming is the strain on Oregon's healthcare system, amplified by our status as a sanctuary state. Healthcare costs are rising unsustainably—per-person spending has jumped nearly 40% since 2015, outpacing wages and inflation, with premiums set to increase \$127–\$456 monthly for thousands if federal credits expire. The state's sustainable cost growth target is now 3.75% for 2026–2030, yet we've missed prior benchmarks, leading to higher burdens on families and employers. As a sanctuary state since 1987, Oregon's policies limit local cooperation with federal immigration enforcement, contributing to increased Medicaid costs through programs like Healthier Oregon, which costs \$700 million per biennium (rising to \$1 billion) without federal matching funds—largely covering non-citizens. With looming federal

cuts potentially slashing \$8 billion in Medicaid funding, and OHA increasing insurer payments by 10.2% in 2026 to stabilize access, reallocating General Fund dollars to an arena is irresponsible and could force even greater strains on healthcare for all residents.

Finally, this bill comes amid broader fiscal mismanagement, exemplified by the recent Senate Bill 1599, which seeks to move a voter referendum on critical transportation infrastructure funding from the high-turnout November 2026 election to the lower-turnout May primary. Over 250,000 Oregonians petitioned to challenge the 6-cent gas tax hike and fee increases for road maintenance and public transit, yet this maneuver undermines democratic intent and could preserve unpopular taxes without full voter scrutiny. At a time when infrastructure needs are urgent, diverting funds to a sports arena while manipulating votes on transportation revenue is a betrayal of taxpayer trust.

Oregon taxpayers deserve transparency and accountability, not backroom deals that prioritize a Portland venue over statewide priorities. Please vote no on SB 1501 and focus on sustainable solutions for education, healthcare, and infrastructure that benefit all communities, including those in Central Oregon like Redmond. I am happy to discuss this further and encourage you to consider the voices of everyday Oregonians in your decision-making.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Rebecca Benally". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rebecca" and last name "Benally" clearly distinguishable.

Rebecca Benally

Redmond, Oregon