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Jim Souers

CEO, Warm Spring Economic Development Corporation & Kah-Nee-Ta Hot Springs Resort

Bill Number and Committee: HB 4148A – Testimony to the Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue

Dear Chair Broadman, Vice-Chair McLane, and members of the Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue,

My name is Jim Souers, and I am the CEO of Warm Springs Economic Development, a corporation of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs of Oregon (CTWS), as well as the CEO of Tribe's Kah-Nee-Ta Hot Springs Resort. As you may know CTWS funded the redevelopment and re-opening of Kah-Nee-Ta and Visit Central Oregon and Travel Oregon provided significant support and funding which contributed significantly to the success the Resort's rebirth. Kah-Nee-Ta opened in 1964 as the first Tribal tourism resort in Oregon and I appreciate the opportunity to convey our concerns with HB 4148A as it is currently written.

As a business in the tourism and hospitality industry, I understand the unique challenges and constraints faced by increases in tourism. I also understand the value that tourism brings to the local economies of our state. It is the successful collaboration between tourism and hospitality businesses and Chambers and DMOs that is helping to generate economic impact and create new jobs across Oregon, in even the most rural parts of our state.

While this bill is close to a solution, as written, it leaves us with some significant questions and concerns around the resiliency grants for small businesses in the restaurant and lodging industry, including:

- In Central Oregon, many local governments currently receive greater than 50% of TLT collections. This bill in its current form would mean a pay cut for our government partners - something we would never support.
- Creating resiliency grants for small businesses in the restaurant and lodging industry is a long-term investment in the tourism industry, but without clear guardrails or limits on the fund, this language lacks clear oversight and may lead to mismanagement. How do we define the size of the grants, define what is considered resiliency, or what is considered a small business?



- Given that the resiliency grants are drawn from the same 50% as tourism promotion, this would pit local Chambers and DMOs against our stakeholders for available funding.
- The resiliency grants would be geared toward restaurants and lodging industries. What does this mean for other tourism-related businesses like activity providers, content creators, or arts and culture businesses? How do we or local governments explain why they were excluded?
- Many Central Oregon DMOs including Visit Central Oregon already manage grant programming through programs such as the Future Fund. This work is already being done, and creating this program would be redundant.

While HB 4148A as currently written is close to a solution, it lacks needed refinement before being passed into law. Without adding additional parameters around the resiliency grants or removing the language from the bill entirely, this bill poses several risks to DMOs, Chambers, and local governments in Central Oregon. We believe in solutions that work for all, and this bill is not there yet. Without refining or removing the resiliency grants language, we can not support this bill as it is currently written.

Your willingness to push pause on HB 4148A will allow for more thoughtful and robust discussion from those impacted and will allow us to work together toward a solution that works for everyone.

Thank you for helping your tourism constituency remain stewards of Oregon's natural wonders. We will continue our work to support vibrant local communities to improve livability for all residents of Oregon.

Thank you for the privilege to submit my testimony for your consideration.

Jim Souers

CEO

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