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Representative Paul Evans, Chair,
House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness
Oregon State Legislature

February 10, 2020

RE: HB4111, Voluntary Oregon Outdoor Recreation Search and Rescue Card Program

Dear Chair Evans and Members of the Committee:

The Port of Hood River owns and operates multiple watersport recreation sites on the south shore of the Columbia River in the city of Hood River, Oregon. In this capacity, the Port wishes to express our support for HB4111, and our gratitude to the bill's sponsors, including District 52 Representative Anna Williams. The territory served by the Hood River County Sheriff's Department includes half of Mount Hood, a portion of the Pacific Crest Trail, and some of the busiest windsurfing and kiteboarding destination beaches in the world in the center of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

Hood River County had over one million overnight visitors in 2018. While the Hood River County Sheriff's office serves, and is funded by, only 23,000 residents. Including day trip visitors from nearby Portland, the number of people who depend on the Sheriff's department search and rescue and emergency response capabilities numbers in the millions each year as people from around the world are drawn to, and drawn into, the dramatic and often dangerous, and vulnerable wildland landscapes of the region. We've got folks climbing across glaciers, scaling cliffs, wandering through vast forests, swimming and surfing in a federal waterway and major shipping channel, and flying through the air, strapped to huge kites in 30 mph gusts. These are not your run-of-the-mill-tourists. They often get into serious trouble out there, and often require large, expensive emergency response.

House Bill 4111 provides these visitors an opportunity to voluntarily support their own safety net by contributing financially to the search and rescue operations conducted by the local first responders. While this effort is not likely to relieve the unfair burden carried by Oregon's rural county Sheriff and fire departments related to search and rescue, it at least gives the end users a chance to help. Thank you for your leadership in helping to find a solution to this significant problem for our rural county.

Sincerely,

Michael McElwee
Executive Director
Port of Hood River