



February 3, 2020

Representative Evans,
House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Management
900 Court St., NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: HB 2593 Support, Outdoor Recreation Search and Rescue Cards

Dear Chair Evans, Vice-Chair Lewis, Vice-Chair Meek & Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge tourism industry, I am writing to ask for your support of HB 2593 which would allow members of the public to make voluntary contributions to search and rescue efforts in Oregon by purchasing cards and making voluntary donations to support search and rescue organizations and county sheriff offices.

The counties of the Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge region are all too familiar with the increased use by locals and visitors of our beautiful outdoor recreation areas year after year both from trails in the Gorge to mountain climbers on Mt. Hood. Sheriff English from Hood River County has been an incredible voice for the funding and support needs of search and rescue in the region, and because of our conversations with him, in 2018 The Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge Regional Tourism Alliance, along with Friends of the Gorge, launched the Trail Ambassador program to put volunteers at busy trailheads that have experienced search and rescue increases, to help educate folks at the trailhead about smarter choices and preparedness before they get on trail. This program now has over 120 volunteers, who have communicated with over 40,000 visitors. The program has since been replicated on the Oregon Coast, Forest Park, and up in the state of Washington.

But messaging and communication is not enough. It is crucial that we have well-supported, and easily accessible search and rescue efforts available to locals and visitors. We look forward to partnering with Travel Oregon, land managers, and others as the search and rescue card is developed to promote it in our region, and continue to support of responsible recreation.

Sincerely,

Lizzie Keenan

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