



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

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RE: Testimony on SB 534

Chair Manning, Vice-Chair Thomsen and Members of the Committee,

While Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) has no position on SB 534, the agency would like to provide information about the Special Access Pass program. This program provides extensive free camping to veterans, active duty military on leave, and Oregon foster families.

Currently, the Special Access Pass program is open to all U.S. veterans with any level of service-connected disability throughout the United States and Oregon-certified foster families and adoptive foster families. Qualified veterans in the program are eligible for ten nights of camping free of charge each month within an Oregon State Park or Oregon Department of Forestry campground. Program participants also receive free day use and showers at all Oregon State Parks year-round.

Service-connected disabled veterans apply for a Special Access Pass by submitting a half page application and documentation certifying a service-connected disability rating of 0% or greater. The card is valid for ten years and can be renewed with an address and signature verification. There is no cost to participate in this program.

Currently, 39,412 service-connected disabled veterans are active Special Access Pass program participants, and 72% are Oregon residents. Over the last three years, OPRD has waived an average of \$1.5 million per year in camping fees for veterans in this program. Other states offer a waiver program to disabled veterans, but Oregon's program is rare in that it is open to residents of other states and sets no lower limit on the disability required to qualify.

In 2019, OPRD held a series of focus groups and conducted an electronic survey with disabled veterans as part of a program review. Of the nearly 4,000 participants responding to the survey, 96% were satisfied or very satisfied with the Special Access Pass program. Based on feedback received during this review, the agency extended the length of time between card renewals, clarified stay limits and improved tracking of reservations.

Oregon Parks and Recreation Department operates the state park system without any General Fund revenue. State parks are funded through a combination of park visitor revenue, a share of the recreation vehicle registration fee—which make up more than half the funding—and a share of constitutionally-dedicated Lottery approved by Oregon voters in 1999 and 2010. As an agency, we are careful to balance discounts or fee waiver programs offered to help minimize the costs passed on to all visitors.