

Submitter: Bonnie Henderson  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary  
Measure: SB1576

Support for Recreational Immunity Fix Amendment to SB 1576

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and members of the committee:

I am an avid hiker and hiking guidebook author focused mainly on the Oregon Coast. My particular interest is the Oregon Coast Trail, a 400-plus-mile route that includes public beaches, trails through state park and national forest land, and city and county paths, adding up to a continuous route from the Columbia River to the California border. It is one of Oregon's Signature Trails and attracts hikers from all over the world. I have personally met hikers from China to Germany, New Zealand to Ireland, who came to Oregon specifically to hike the Oregon Coast Trail.

A great deal of money and time—on the part of public employees, hired consultants and community volunteers—has been invested, particularly in the past decade, to improve the Oregon Coast Trail and to promote its use. That work has been driven in part by a state senate bill mandating its improvement. Use of the trail has skyrocketed as a result, and it is likely to continue to grow in popularity as it becomes better known and guidebooks and navigational apps make it easier to use. Late in 2023 a comprehensive 6+-year effort to create roadmap for future improvement of the OCT--the Oregon Coast Trail Action Plan--was completed. All that progress is threatened if portions of the trail are closed to the public due to concerns about liability.

The OCT is the best kind of tourism on the Oregon Coast: hikers spend money (on lodging, camping, meals, etc.) without exacerbating highway and parking area overcrowding.

Recreational immunity is essential to maintaining this momentum and keeping the Oregon Coast Trail open. Hiking (or walking, whatever you might call it) inherently involves risk, whether on a little beach access path or a trail through the forest. Landowners must be protected if a recreational user seeks damages after an injury. All fifty states in the U.S. have enacted statutes that confer some degree of liability protection to landowners who allow the general public to use their land for recreational purposes. This bill provides a critical emergency fix, and I am also eager to see a permanent fix to provide landowners with the assurance they need to plan for future recreation access.

Please pass SB 1576-3 with language that clearly restores recreational immunity for

public and private landowners and clearly applies to both improved and unimproved trails.

Thank you very much for your consideration. Feel free to reach out to me for more information about the Oregon Coast Trail and its place in Oregon's tourism industry through my website, [hikingtheoct.com](http://hikingtheoct.com).