

Submitter: Connie Soper
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure: SB1576

February 10, 2024

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

We are writing to urge your support for SB 1576-3 with language that clearly restores recreational immunity for public and private landowners and applies to both improved and unimproved trails. At this time, we support a temporary “fix” with the goal of developing a permanent, comprehensive solution.

Residents and visitors alike greatly appreciate Oregon’s scenic beauty and the many opportunities to take advantage of hiking along an incredible network of trails throughout the state. Access to these activities promotes a healthier lifestyle, mental and emotional well-being, and provides economic advantages to countless businesses and organizations engaged in providing and/or supporting recreational activities.

For several years, we have been directly involved in efforts intended to complete the Oregon Coast Trail (OCT), which spans the entire Oregon coastline from the Washington to the California border. A completed trail will allow for the only trail in the country that traverses an entire coastline. This unique asset will promote tourism and encourage new visitors to the coast, whether for day hikes or for a through-hike.

This trail is scenic and diverse, and celebrates Oregon’s public beaches. Unlike other states, the Oregon shoreline offers many public points of access. Unfortunately, the trail is not yet completed, and these “gaps,” or unfinished portions of the trail require hikers to walk along the shoulder of US Highway 101 or other roadways not intended for pedestrian use. We worked with Senator David Brock Smith and other legislators to sponsor legislation to complete an Action Plan intended to recommend solutions for addressing these gaps. The legislation was enacted in 2017, and the Action Plan was recently completed.

Many stakeholders are enthused about working together to address the gaps and to develop new trails and access points intended to complete the OCT. However, due to the recent court decision, these efforts are on hold due to the confusion about recreational immunity. Ironically, unless this confusion is clarified and recreational immunity restored, hikers of the OCT will not be able to access safe and scenic alternatives to walking along the shoulder of a busy highway.

Thank you for your efforts at addressing this critical issue. Access to recreation is the heartbeat of this beautiful state, and provides benefits for this and future generations—benefits that greatly outweigh any perceived risks.

Sincerely yours,

Connie Soper, Portland, Or

Dan Hilburn, Sun River, OR

Ann Hanus, Salem, OR