

Submitter: Neyssa Hays
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB179

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Neyssa Hays, and I am writing in strong support of SB 179 to ensure Oregon's trails remain open and accessible. As Chair of the Yamhill County Parks Advisory Board and co-founder and director of Outdoor Education Adventures, I have spent my career advocating for equitable access to outdoor spaces, particularly for youth and families.

I have a deep personal and professional connection to Oregon's trails. While living in Portland, I commuted nearly 20 miles daily by bike for over a decade, transported my children to school and appointments on two wheels, and enjoyed mountain biking and equestrian trail riding. Since moving back to Yamhill County in 2014, I have championed projects like the Yamhelas Westsider Trail to increase self-sufficiency for kids, expand equitable access to outdoor programs like Outdoor Education Adventures (OEA), and promote healthier transportation alternatives.

Oregon's trails provide countless benefits to individuals and communities. However, without strong recreational immunity protections, many landowners may feel compelled to close access due to liability concerns. SB 179 is critical because it removes the sunset on the current law, ensuring long-term protections for landowners and continued public access to outdoor spaces.

Beyond recreation, this bill has significant implications for outdoor education and community programming. As the director of Outdoor Education Adventures, I know firsthand how difficult it can be to find suitable venues to take kids outside to play, adventure, and learn. Many landowners hesitate to allow youth programs on their property due to liability concerns. Strengthening and making recreational immunity permanent through SB 179 would help alleviate these concerns, opening up more opportunities for outdoor education and ensuring that future generations have safe and welcoming spaces to explore nature.

I also urge the committee to consider amendments that would:

Extend increased immunity protections to private landowners who voluntarily open their land for public recreation.

Clarify that trails serving both recreation and transportation purposes are covered under the law to eliminate ambiguity.

Use broader language such as "conveyance" rather than listing specific activities like

walking, biking, and running to ensure all users are protected.
By passing SB 179, you will help protect Oregon's outdoor spaces and ensure that communities, educators, and landowners can continue providing vital access to nature.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Neyssa Hays
Yamhill, OR