

February 15, 2025

Joint Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Natural Resources

RE: Support for HB 5021 – Oregon State Marine Board Budget

Dear Co-Chairs, Frederick and Levy, and Members of the Committee

Empowering Access is an Oregon based disability, equity and inclusion consulting business. Our mission is to provide equitable experience and knowledge-based guidance to those looking to engage in disability, equity and inclusion work. To listen, learn and amplify voices with lived experience as a means to empowering inclusion in all built environments, indoors and out.

Empowering Access supports the State Marine Board's biennial budget and specifically the Facilities construction and maintenance budget that includes an increase in limitation for the Waterway Access Grant Program.

The State Marine Board does not own or operate any boating access facilities but provides vital funding and guidance for accessible water access that would otherwise not exist. Agency staff work with City, County, Ports, Park Districts, State and Federal Agencies as well as Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribal Nations to improve boating access facilities for motorized and nonmotorized boaters of all types, interests, and needs. The grant funding and technical assistance provided to boating facility owners is essential to improving accessibility for all recreational boaters that have largely been left out of water access development. With their hard work and attention to equitable practices, Oregon's waterways are seeing a significant increase in access for all abilities, ages and interests, along with an increase in knowledge about accessible planning and design. This program is a major asset to the aging and disabled community and we would love to see them receive the support they need to fully serve the community.

Empowering Access enthusiastically encourages the Committee to support HB5021.

Thank you for your time,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ashley Schahfer', written in a cursive style.

Ashley Schahfer

Owner, Empowering Access