

Submitter: BENJAMIN LELAND  
On Behalf Of: TEAM DIRT  
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB179  
Oregon Senate Committee on Judiciary  
Re: Support for SB 179 – Permanent Protection for Landowners and Trail Access

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

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 179, which makes permanent the temporary changes to Oregon's landowner immunity laws enacted by Chapter 64, Oregon Laws 2024. This legislation is essential to ensuring continued public access to recreational trails while protecting landowners, municipalities, and volunteer organizations from undue legal exposure.

A recent lawsuit against the City of Newport has already had a chilling effect on trail access in the City of Waldport, and it threatens to set a dangerous precedent for public and private landowners across the state.

Yachats News: Coastal cities scrambling to examine or close their local trails following Oregon Appeals Court decision in Newport case

The implications of this decision extend far beyond the coast. If personal injury lawsuits continue to erode landowner immunity protections, Oregon's vast network of trails—many of which exist thanks to the cooperation of private landowners, local governments, and nonprofit trail stewards—will become uninsurable and, ultimately, inaccessible.

I understand that legal liability and personal injury claims are complex issues. However, allowing increased litigation against landowners who provide free public access to outdoor recreation does not serve the broader interests of our communities. Instead, it creates an environment where landowners—public and private—have no choice but to close access to trails, parks, and natural spaces out of fear of financial and legal ruin.

As policymakers, you have a duty to protect both public access and the landowners who make that access possible. SB 179 provides a necessary safeguard, ensuring that responsible landowners and their agents are not forced to choose between supporting outdoor recreation and facing untenable legal risks.

I urge you to support this legislation and help preserve Oregon's outdoor heritage for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Benjamin Leland  
Treasurer, Team Dirt  
<https://teamdirt.org>