



Date: February 21, 2025

Name: Christina Rehklau, Executive Director, Visit Corvallis

Re: HB 2977 – Testimony to the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Dear Chair Helm, Chair Owens, Vice-Chair McDonald, and members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water:

I'm Christina Rehklau, Executive Director of Visit Corvallis, and a Corvallis resident for over six years. I appreciate the opportunity to express our opposition to HB 2977.

It is always a delicate balance between protecting the natural environments we love and the economic pressures we face. While I support conservation efforts, this tax increase would hurt local businesses, jobs, and communities that rely on tourism.

As the Executive Director of Visit Corvallis, I see firsthand how tourism benefits our economy. Here in Benton County, visitor spending generates **\$181.4 million**, supports **1,950 local jobs**, and brings in **\$5.4 million** in tax revenue for the state. These dollars help small businesses, restaurants, hotels, and attractions thrive.

Corvallis is also home to **Oregon State University**, which hosts **research conferences, sports events, and academic gatherings** that bring thousands of visitors to our city. A higher lodging tax would make us less competitive for these events, pushing them to states with lower hotel taxes.

Our local businesses are already struggling due to the **Pac-12 realignment**, which has reduced visitor spending, and the closure of the **Osborn Aquatic Center**, which means no regional swim meets. Adding a higher lodging tax on top of these losses would make it even harder for our businesses to recover.

Since 2003, TLT funds have doubled visitor spending, tripled tax revenue, and created over 100,000 jobs statewide. Travel Oregon supports jobs and provides **grants that help communities like ours fund critical projects** that support small businesses. Redirecting these funds away from tourism would **weaken our ability to attract visitors and hurt local economies**.

I strongly urge you to vote against HB 2977. Instead of taking funds away from tourism, we should focus on solutions that strengthen our communities without hurting small businesses. Thank you for your time and service to our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christina Rehklau".

Executive Director, Visit Corvallis