

CURTIS WRIGHT
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February 22, 2025

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

I am writing to express my strong opposition to Oregon House Bill 2977, which seeks to increase the state transient lodging tax (TLT) to fund the "Recovering Oregon's Wildlife Fund Subaccount." While I support responsible conservation efforts, this proposed bill unfairly burdens Oregon's local economies—such as the City of Corvallis—by assuredly reducing critical funds available for essential services due to the additional financial strain it places on the tourism industry.

Corvallis generates nearly \$3 million each year in transient lodging tax revenue, with 70% allocated to its general fund. This revenue supports essential city services such as public safety, infrastructure maintenance, and vital community programs. Increasing the state TLT will not only reduce Corvallis's ability to provide these services but also discourage tourism, which is a key driver of our local economy.

I served five years on the board of directors for Visit Corvallis, including two years as chair. I understand the challenges of attracting more visitors to our city. I also served eleven years on the City of Corvallis Budget Commission, nine of which I spent as chair. I am acutely aware of the serious financial hurdles our city faces in funding the essential services that residents rely on. A higher lodging tax risks making Corvallis—and Oregon as a whole—a less competitive destination for tourists, pushing travelers toward more affordable options in other states. Local businesses, especially small, independent hotels and bed-and-breakfasts, will face decreased bookings as visitors seek out cheaper alternatives. This increased tax burden may also deter conferences, sports tournaments, and other events that significantly contribute to the city's revenue.

Moreover, the structure of this bill creates a regressive taxation model that disproportionately affects middle-class travelers and families. Unlike conservation initiatives that secure funding from corporate partnerships or specific grants, HB 2977 places extra costs on visitors and local businesses, many of which are still recovering from recent economic downturns. This approach is not only unjust but also shortsighted in its economic implications.

Instead of increasing the transient lodging tax, I urge you to explore alternative funding sources for conservation efforts that do not negatively impact Oregon's tourism economy. Redirecting existing state funds, seeking private-public partnerships, or implementing voluntary conservation fees are all viable options that would protect both Oregon's natural resources and the economic health of its communities.

I respectfully urge you to oppose HB 2977 to protect the economic stability of communities throughout Oregon and ensure that the essential services they fund with transient lodging taxes are not diminished.

Sincerely,



Curtis Wright