

Date: March 17, 2025

Name: Kim Molnar, Director of Tourism, Explore Prineville/Prineville Crook County Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center

Bill Number and Committee: HB 3556 – Testimony to the House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans

Dear Chair Tran, Vice-Chair Grayber, Vice-Chair Lewis, and members of the House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans.

My name is Kim Molnar and I am Director of Tourism for Explore Prineville, the Tourism division of the Prineville – Crook County Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center. I appreciate the opportunity to convey my strong opposition to HB 3556 on behalf of the staff and Board of Directors for our organization.

With over seven years of experience working for Prineville’s Destination Marketing Organization, I have played an active role in promoting tourism throughout Prineville and Crook County. My work has focused on showcasing our region’s unique attractions, supporting local businesses, and enhancing visitors’ experiences. From highlighting outdoor recreation and cultural events to collaborating with partners to expand sustainable tourism opportunities, I have been dedicated to driving economic growth while preserving the area's natural beauty and heritage. This experience has given me a deep understanding of Prineville’s tourism potential and the value it brings to our community.

Collaboration between our organization, Visit Central Oregon and Travel Oregon play a crucial role in driving economic growth and creating new jobs across the state, including rural areas like Crook County. We have grown this relationship strongly in the past few years and have put a focus on tourism development and marketing efforts on non-peak travel seasons. This approach not only promotes year-round job security and stability but also strengthens our local economy. As a result, we have been able to implement community-focused programs that align with Oregon's values.

For example, at the Prineville – Crook County Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center, we have implemented the following programs to support our local community:

- *The Transient Room Tax (TRT) has played a crucial role in funding the creation of Explore Prineville, which has significantly enhanced our ability to promote Prineville as a travel destination. These funds allowed us to develop a comprehensive tourism marketing strategy, expanding our reach and attracting more visitors to our area. As a result, the growth of Explore Prineville has not only strengthened our local tourism efforts but has also created new job opportunities within our organization. With the increased demand for tourism services, we've been able to hire additional staff to manage the growing responsibilities of promoting the area, further contributing to the local economy. TRT's have proven to be an invaluable resource in driving both tourism and employment in Prineville.*
- *The High Desert Moonfest was created as a vibrant celebration designed to draw visitors to Prineville during the quieter, off-peak travel season and was funded in part by a grant from Visit Central Oregon. Recognizing the need to support local businesses and maintain economic stability year-round, Explore Prineville and the Prineville Chamber strategically planned the festival to take place outside the busy summer months. Moonfest showcases Prineville's rich culture, music, and outdoor recreation, encouraging both locals and visitors to explore the area when crowds are smaller. This intentional timing helps extend the tourism season, providing a welcome boost to local businesses while fostering a stronger sense of community.*

Tourism has become a cornerstone of Oregon's economy, largely due to the Tourism Investment Proposal of 2003, which led to the creation of Travel Oregon. This initiative also established a dedicated funding stream through the statewide transient lodging tax and safeguarded local tourism investments. The Governor and legislators saw the need for strategic, long-term investment to position Oregon as a premier destination for both business and leisure travel.

Local Economic Impact:

- TRT Funding:
 - Over just the past five years, we have seen an increase in TRT funding to our organization increase at 152% and add over \$110 thousand dollars to our operating budget. This represents a substantial boost in our funding.

This funding has been especially crucial for a rural area like ours, which is transitioning from traditional resource-based economies to ones that carefully incorporate tourism marketing

and management. It's essential that we maintain this momentum, as it is vital for our rural partners and their continued success.

Thank you for supporting the tourism sector and for helping us continue our stewardship of Crook County's natural beauty. We remain committed to enhancing the livability of our communities, benefiting all residents of Oregon.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kim Molnar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kim Molnar, Director of Tourism

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