

Submitter: Kory Mahr
On Behalf Of: Visit Grants Pass
Committee: House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3556

House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: HB 3556 Relating to the use of local transient tax revenue

Chair Tran, Vice Chair Grayber, Vice Chair Lewis, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express opposition to House Bill 3556. This bill proposes to extend the permissible uses of net revenue from lodging taxes, stripping away a key

investment in our economic sustainability and growth.

Southern Oregon was once heavily dependent on the timber and logging industries as its primary

economic drivers. However, with industry declines due to federal policies, market shifts, and

environmental regulations, our region faced significant economic challenges. Over the past several

decades, we have worked diligently to reinvent ourselves, with tourism emerging as a cornerstone

of our regional economy. Today, it is a vital economic engine, significantly contributing to the

financial health and community well-being of our area.

In 2023, direct travel spending in Southern Oregon reached approximately \$1.1 billion, marking a

4.2% increase from the previous year. This spending supported over 12,300 jobs, generating

earnings of \$315 million for local workers. Additionally, travel-generated tax receipts amounted to

\$55 million, benefiting both state and local governments.

Over the past decade, our tourism sector has demonstrated robust growth:

- Travel spending increased by 35% between 2013 and 2023, with an annual growth rate of approximately 3.5%.
- Employment in the tourism industry expanded by 20%, adding nearly 2,050 jobs.
- Earnings for employees in this sector rose by 28%, creating stronger income opportunities for residents.

The current statutory framework, that directs local transient lodging taxes to be dedicated to

tourism promotion and tourism-related facilities has been and continues to be crucial to build and maintain this industry. It ensures that the taxes collected from visitors are reinvested into the tourism sector, fostering a cycle of growth and sustainability. This in turn continues to build on the portion of lodging tax revenues that are unrestricted.

HB 3556 proposes to divert these funds to public safety services and community infrastructure.

While these services are essential, reallocating funds designated for tourism promotion could undermine the very industry that generates this revenue. Such a shift may result in reduced marketing efforts, diminished visitor experiences, and ultimately, a decline in tourism-related income and employment—jeopardizing the economic progress Southern Oregon has worked so hard to achieve.

We acknowledge the funding challenges faced by local governments in supporting critical services.

However, expanding the use of transient lodging tax revenues beyond their intended purpose may have unintended consequences, including weakening the competitiveness and economic contributions of our tourism sector.

In conclusion, we urge the committee to reject HB 3556 and preserve the existing allocations of transient lodging tax revenues to ensure continued support for this vital economic sector. Southern Oregon's reinvention through tourism has taken decades, and we cannot afford to reverse course now.

Thank you for considering our perspective.

Sincerely,

Kory Mahr

General Manager

Orange Torpedo Trips

Briggs Rogue River Guide Service

Whitewater Cowboys