

Submitter: Karen Rippberger

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3556

My name is Karen Rippberger, and I serve as immediate past chair of the Stonewall Caucus of the Democratic Party of Oregon. I am also an employee of the La Pine Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center, though I am testifying today in my personal capacity and not on behalf of the Caucus or the Chamber.

I strongly oppose HB3556 in its current form, particularly as it proposes to divert funding originally allocated to tourism marketing and development to other uses, including public safety and community infrastructure. While these areas are important, I am concerned about the predictable and detrimental outcomes that this funding diversion will have on protected populations, especially those from LGBTQ+, racial minority, and disability communities, both in rural Oregon and across the state. Stonewall Caucus has long advocated for visibility, inclusion, and representation of LGBTQ+ Oregonians in all facets of life, including tourism. The LGBTQ+ community, particularly in rural areas like La Pine, already faces significant challenges in accessing safe, welcoming spaces for travel and recreation. Diverting tourism funds would effectively cut critical resources dedicated to making rural Oregon more inclusive for LGBTQ+ travelers. The result will be reduced visibility for LGBTQ+ businesses and a lack of support for community-specific outreach efforts, such as festivals, events, and marketing campaigns that highlight inclusive travel destinations. We cannot afford to turn back the clock on the progress we've made in promoting rural tourism as a safe and welcoming space for LGBTQ+ travelers.

Moreover, the lack of accessible tourism options for people with disabilities is an ongoing concern in our state. Access to wheelchair-friendly accommodations, accessible transportation, and inclusive visitor services is essential for ensuring that all Oregonians, regardless of ability, can enjoy the tourism experiences our state has to offer.

The economic consequences for racial minorities, including Indigenous communities and communities of color, should also be seriously considered. Reducing or eliminating funding for tourism marketing targeting these groups would perpetuate the exclusion of already marginalized communities from the economic and social benefits of tourism. Our rural areas, which often rely heavily on tourism, are no exception. We must continue to prioritize investment in inclusive tourism infrastructure and marketing to ensure that everyone—no matter their race, ethnicity, or background—has access to Oregon's natural beauty and cultural richness.

As a resident of La Pine, I also see firsthand the impact tourism has on our local economy. La Pine and surrounding areas like Newberry Country are working hard to build inclusive and accessible travel opportunities. Diverting funds from tourism

initiatives directly threatens these efforts. It would discourage tourism growth in our region, harming local businesses that rely on diverse tourism dollars and preventing protected populations from fully participating in these economic opportunities.

I urge you to reject HB3556 in its current form and consider how these funding diversions will disproportionately harm the communities that need support the most. Oregon has made progress in creating a tourism industry that is inclusive and welcoming to all, and we cannot afford to turn back that progress. Please prioritize the economic and social well-being of protected populations in Oregon and ensure that funding for inclusive tourism continues to serve our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Karen Rippberger

Immediate Past Chair, Stonewall Caucus, Democratic Party of Oregon (testifying in personal capacity)

Employee, La Pine Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center (testifying in personal capacity)