



P.O. Box 243
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Re: Testimony in Support of HB 2977

Dear Chair Nathanson, Vice-chairs Reschke and Walters, and members of this committee.

My name is Erin Sito, and I am providing support for HB 2977 from the perspective of an out-of-stater and organization leader who is more than happy to pay an increased transient lodging tax (TLT) in my personal and professional capacity when visiting, and planning work meetings in Oregon, to ensure that the state's wildlife and wild places are sustained for future generations.

I love Oregon and come back several times a year to visit family and friends and do business. I lived in this state for six years before heading back east to be closer to Washington D.C., for my role as the U.S. Public Policy Director for a conservation non-profit called Wildlands Network. As a professional working on both state and federal conservation policy issues, I can say with confidence that States *must* be able to step up and provide resources for wildlife conservation in light of the current instability of support from the federal level.

I have been supportive of increasing the TLT for conservation going back years, to when I was an Oregonian. This funding mechanism has been introduced and brought to a hearing multiple times now, and yet we still seem to be giving weight to the same unsubstantiated arguments against increasing the TLT. Now, more than ever, I encourage the members of this committee to take a hard look at arguments on both sides and find a consensus to ensure that Oregon has sustainable funding to support its needed wildlife and habitat restoration efforts.

In particular, my testimony seeks to provide an alternative perspective to the most common argument against this tax, that higher lodging taxes make Oregon less attractive for conventions, events, and group travel, driving business to lower-tax states.

Conference and convention planners consider many other factors when deciding what city to hold their event in, including the centrality of the city for folks traveling, the year-round weather, walkability and safety, and the city's attractions and nightlife. I choose to visit and plan meetings in Oregon because of how beautiful the state is and how much I, and others in my industry, love visiting wild places and having the chance to see wildlife I would not get to see where I live. I personally and professionally do not consider the TLT when I am choosing a place to do business.

From the for-profit perspective, a friend of mine in the natural foods industry, who used to travel to Portland quite frequently for trade shows, confirmed that they also do not consider the TLT when traveling because they simply write off the cost as a business expense. They added that, for them, knowing that their money would be spent on efforts that sustain the local environment would actually be a positive deciding factor, as it aligns with their industry's ethos.

Moreover, Oregon already has one of the lowest TLTs in the country in addition to having no sales tax, and still, none of its cities are currently making the top 25 list of places to hold conventions. The [top 25 cities](#) in the U.S. that host the most conventions are actually located in states with much higher state TLTs, with the highest being 14.5% in Washington D.C., and the average across all these states being roughly 3% (3.12%). When you factor in the additional applicable sales tax to those states where the most conventions are held, that average total tax becomes at least 5.25%. These numbers are consistent with my prior anecdotal statements, that the TLT does not seem to be the deciding factor when it comes to planners picking a city to hold their conventions. Most importantly, these numbers show that, even if it were a deciding factor, an increase in Oregon's TLT to 2.5 percent would still make it competitive when compared to the states most popular for holding conventions.

Each time this idea is brought to the legislature, we hear from more people about why they come to Oregon to visit and do business, and time and time again we consistently hear that people choose Oregon because of its natural beauty. I'm asking that this committee strongly consider passage of HB 2977, because if we do not invest in sustaining this natural beauty, what the state stands to lose would make it even less competitive in the tourism and business travel industry in the long run.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erin Sito". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Erin" being more prominent than the last name "Sito".

Erin Sito, JD
U.S. Public Policy Director
Wildlands Network

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