

Submitter: Benjamin Leland
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Finance and Revenue
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1196

Dear Members of the Committee,

While much of the public discourse surrounding liability waiver relief has focused on ski resorts and cases of gross negligence, I want to highlight the far-reaching and often-overlooked impact of this issue—one that directly affects the volunteers and small organizations that sustain Oregon's outdoor recreation economy.

I have spent years as a board member, and I currently serve as Treasurer, for Team Dirt, a local Benton County mountain biking club and 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Our mission is simple yet critical: to steward and maintain sustainable, multi-use trails, preserve mountain biking access through advocacy and education, and promote responsible trail use. We work alongside land managers like the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, OSU College of Forestry, and Starker Forests to ensure that our region's trails remain open and safe for all users—hikers, bikers, and equestrians alike.

But this work comes at a cost.

Last year, our all-volunteer organization dedicated over 2,200 hours to maintaining and improving trails across Benton County. Many of your constituents, for example, enjoy hiking Marys Peak. What they may not realize is that every year, volunteers—ordinary community members like myself—spend countless hours clearing fallen trees, repairing trail tread, and maintaining drainage systems to keep those trails accessible. They may see the fresh sawdust from a recently cut tree and assume the U.S. Forest Service handled it. More often than not, it was a volunteer crew, working tirelessly behind the scenes.

And yet, despite this vital work, our small nonprofit pays over \$4,300 a year in liability insurance—an expense that is rising as insurers grow increasingly unwilling to cover organizations like ours due to the perceived risks associated with outdoor recreation. Despite having a perfect safety record, we live in constant fear of non-renewal, which could effectively force us to shut down our efforts. Worse still, if an incident were to occur, should my wife and I—should any volunteer—have to fear losing our home simply because we chose to serve our community?

House Bill 3140 is not about shielding bad actors or promoting negligence. It's about restoring balance. The current legal landscape, shaped by the 2014 Supreme Court ruling, has made it increasingly difficult for community-driven organizations to survive.

Without waiver relief and protection, many small clubs like ours—and the thousands of volunteer hours we contribute—are at risk of disappearing. The result? More trails lost to neglect, fewer opportunities for outdoor recreation, and a diminished quality of life for Oregonians who cherish our natural spaces.

This is why I urge you to support Senate Bill 1196. It's time to protect the very people who dedicate themselves to maintaining the trails and outdoor spaces that make Oregon such a remarkable place to live.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Benjamin Leland
Treasurer, Team Dirt
<https://teamdirt.org>