



June 23, 2025

Senators,

The Gresham Area Chamber of Commerce is the largest business organization in East County. The city of Gresham has over 117,000 residents and the Gresham Chamber is the visitor center. We receive Transient Lodging tax from the Portland Region as well as the City of Gresham through the taxing methods.

We strongly oppose HB 3556. It is ever so tempting to divert funds away from tourism. There are ALWAYS going to be jurisdictional needs. I was personally involved as an elected official in the legislature when the Oregon Tourism was conceived and the taxing method idea formulated. Lengthy conversations, research, and needs were discussed, not only that session, but subsequent sessions until the passage of Oregon Tourism Commission and the funding mechanism.

Oregon Tourism has generated millions of dollars, thousands of jobs, and has benefited all corners of Oregon. But it was through a disciplined process of marketing and distribution. HB 3556 would rob dollars have been and are wisely and strategically used on an industry that has grown because of the funding availability.

When I was Speaker of the House in 2000, discussions were underway of how to take advantage of the natural beauty and recreational opportunities Oregon possesses. The conversations steered clear of taking any funds from existing departments or funding mechanisms to fund tourism. (Lottery dollars, for instance) Adding a new tax to Oregonians for tourism marketing purposes was a nonstarter. The mechanism for revenue was established through charging our visitors for lodging.

Immediately, jurisdictions started using the tax collected for areas in their budgets not directly related to tourism. Additional safeguards were added the following session to correct those misguided decisions about what qualified as "tourism". House Bill 3556 is doing what we fought to steer clear of...taking dollars intended for use to market and spending those dollars on anything else. It is not wise nor was it the original intention. No matter the need or what it is called (tourism impact services), taking dollars away from marketing will result in fewer visitors.

Do not underestimate the value and effectiveness of Travel Oregon. Do not underestimate the creative minds of local jurisdictions who want to take funds away from a successful program and use those funds on projects and people that will not bring tourists to Oregon.

The Gresham Area Chamber strongly opposes any change in the Transient Lodging tax that would limit or lower the funding amount to Travel Oregon. HB 3556 will start to destroy the Oregon tourism and the travel industry that has taken years to develop.

Sincerely,
Lynn Snodgrass
CEO Gresham Area Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center