



**Date:** February 4, 2026

**Name:** Scott Larson, President & CEO, Visit Central Oregon

**Bill Number and Committee:** HB 4134 – Testimony to the House Committee on Revenue

Dear Chair Nathanson, Vice-Chair Reschke, Vice-Chair Walters, and members of the House Committee on Revenue,

My name is Scott Larson, and I am the President & CEO of Visit Central Oregon, the Destination Marketing and Management Organization for Central Oregon. I appreciate the opportunity to convey our opposition to HB4134.

Having previously worked for both Chambers and DMOs in rural areas, I understand the unique challenges and constraints faced by increases in tourism, particularly on resources and public lands. I also understand the value that tourism brings to the local economies of our state. It is my honor to serve the amazing region of Central Oregon and to work to support all of the communities that we serve and represent, including local visitor centers, regional visitor associations, Chambers, and all of the tourism industry business stakeholders.

It is the successful collaboration between the local and regional DMOs and Travel Oregon that is helping to generate economic impact and create new jobs across Oregon, in even the most rural parts of our state. At DMOs, we focus our tourism development on many programs including destination development initiatives because we understand the importance of reinvesting in the places that we love and protecting the natural environment and the beauty of the outdoors. I am personally a big believer that organizations like ours and others are here to promote but also to protect these resources. They deserve to be shared and they deserve to be cared for.

For example, at Visit Central Oregon, we have implemented the following programs to support the resources so many people enjoy:

- *In Central Oregon, funds were leveraged with local tourism resources to increase access to the outdoors for people with disabilities, to increase our partnership with Leave No Trace and other outdoor recreation entities, trail maintenance and development, and more. Additionally, funds have been awarded to support projects at Kah-Nee-Ta Resort, supporting our Tribal partners as well.*



*Following this current cycle, the Future Fund grant program will have given over \$1.9 million dollars toward 34 projects like these that have broad benefits to both residents and visitors alike.*

At the state level, tourism has become a bedrock of Oregon's economy as a result of the Tourism Investment Proposal of 2003, which created Travel Oregon, established a dedicated funding source through the statewide transient lodging tax, and protected local funding investments in tourism.

During the recession of 2003, the Governor, legislature, and leaders across the state recognized that tourism was an untapped market and that strategic and sustained investment in tourism was needed to establish Oregon as a travel destination for business and leisure.

While we understand the desire for increased funding, **we are opposed to supporting HB 4134 and ask for a no vote on this bill.** Consumers have become increasingly price conscious, and increasing this tax would have negative impacts on Oregon as a competitive destination to visit. Many visitors to Central Oregon are fellow Oregonians, so this increase would be paid by residents of the state, not just visitors, at a time when the cost of living is increasingly difficult. This increased tax would also add additional costs to our smaller properties, some of whom are already struggling with rising prices of running a business. All of these have the potential to lead to a decrease in future business, which would harm our ability to leverage these funds for our communities and brand stewardship initiatives.

### **Regional Economic Impacts:**

In Central Oregon and in 2024 alone, the impact of and benefits of the statewide Transient Lodging Tax (TLT) is clear:

- Nearly \$1.3 billion in visitor spending
- Average visitor spending of nearly \$100 per person per day
- Supported the creation of 10,730 jobs
- Nearly \$64 million in tax revenue was generated by visitor spending, of which \$27 million stayed local and nearly \$37 million went to the state of Oregon
- For every \$1 spent on marketing, the average visitor spends \$127+ in our communities

There are countless programs and stories from Central Oregon that have been galvanized by the lodging tax investments to create sustainable product development and destination development initiatives. These include things like supporting smaller, rural communities with marketing some of the amazing amenities



they already have as well as increasing partnerships with other outdoor recreation non-profits like Leave No Trace. With the proposed increase in statewide lodging tax, we would be adding costs to businesses at a time of rising costs, running the risk of encouraging travelers to go elsewhere, and diminishing our ability to continue this great work in the future. We simply cannot afford to increase taxes at this time.

Your opposition to HB 4134 will allow your constituents and businesses in our region to continue to do the great work that is currently underway, and to continue important projects and partnerships vital to promoting while protecting our future resources.

Thank you for helping your tourism constituency remain stewards of Oregon's natural wonders. We will continue our work to support vibrant local communities to improve livability for all residents of Oregon.

Thank you for the privilege to submit my testimony for your consideration.

*Scott Larson*

*President & CEO*

*Visit Central Oregon*