

February 8, 2026

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

My name is Amanda Bird-Zimmerman, and I am on the Board of Directors of Visit Bend as well as the Assistant Marketing Director & Community Engagement Lead for the Old Mill District and Hayden Homes Amphitheater in Bend, Oregon. I appreciate the opportunity to share my input regarding HB 4148.

It is my understanding that honoring the commitments made to the industry in the 2003 and 2016 state Transient Lodging Tax (TLT) processes was absent in bringing HB 4148 to the short session, and I write today testifying to the value of tourism and asking that you preserve restricted portions of the tax for their original intent, while calling for larger solutions to address our state's tax revenue issues. As a Board Member of Visit Bend, and longtime resident of Central Oregon, I am concerned that HB 4148 expands the allowable uses of restricted funds in ways that threaten their original intent and undermine the long-term economic sustainability of the tourism industry.

Recent studies have shown that the two major industries still growing within the state of Oregon are tourism and health care. In fact, since 2003, tourism has been essential in sustaining Oregon's workforce, economic viability, and quality of life for residents. Visitor spending in Oregon has more than doubled from \$6.5 billion in 2003 to \$14.3 billion today. State and local transient lodging tax revenues have more than tripled, rising from \$200 million in 2003 to \$691 million today. Oregon has also experienced steady annual increases in spending, with all growth outpacing inflation. We are in a challenging economic climate, and it is essential we are careful not to divert transient lodging tax revenue away from the very foundation that was originally established to support Oregon's economic viability.

For that reason, I am submitting neutral testimony on HB 4148, with a critical caveat: the existing rules governing restricted transient lodging tax funds should remain intact and unedited, and the bill should be amended to include stronger guidelines that remove vague language around special districts and other avenues to unintended loopholes.

HB 4148's expansion of allowable uses—particularly, language permitting special districts to provide services “in lieu of” direct city action—creates a double-dip risk that undermines the core intent of the lodging tax and weakens a system that is demonstrably creating jobs and raising wages.

Case studies from destinations that have repurposed restricted lodging tax funds show consistent outcomes: erosion of competitive advantage, avoidable harm to local

businesses, and stalled investments that support the very qualities that make communities desirable places to live and work.

Visit Bend, and our statewide Destination Management Organizations, are responsible and accountable tourism professionals who generate millions of dollars in positive economic impacts for communities throughout Oregon. They work to attract visitors during non-peak travel periods through programs that increase occupancy in slower visitor months and help balance visitor volume across destinations. This strategy helps to even out the seasonality of tourism, ensuring year-round employment and healthy economies for local communities.

Visit Bend has implemented future-forward and community-first programs that support our region and exemplify what it means to be stewards of responsible tourism. In fact, a recent study by OSU found that resident sentiment regarding tourism has improved significantly over the last several years, and Visit Bend is a national leader in how to reinvest TLT into programs that boost the local economy. Specifically:

- The Bend Cultural Tourism Fund (BCTF): a grant program funded by Visit Bend to enhance Bend's economy through cultural tourism. Visit Bend funds the BCTF using 7.5-10% of the organization's total annual public funding received from the City of Bend. Awards have supported cultural opportunities ranging from the Deschutes Public Library's Author! Author! series to a Nordic skiing exhibit at the Deschutes Historical Museum to the Central Oregon Taco Fest, Bend Film Festival, and the Bend A Cappella Festival.
- The Bend Sustainability Fund: a grant program that reinvests tax revenue generated through short-term lodging tax paid by visitors into the places and spaces that create sustainable experiences in our community. Visit Bend's sustainability model seeks to find balance between the economy, people, and place. Examples of projects funded by the BSF include a Big Sky Bike Park Inclusive Experience, Miller's Landing Access and Restoration Project, and the Cascades Theatre Restoration Project, among many others.

These examples highlight just a few of our many programs and successes. Current statute enables the creation of sustainable marketing and product development programs, which are especially critical for communities transitioning from resource-based economies to those that include tourism management and marketing.

Reducing or eliminating the momentum created by tourism investments would have serious impacts to Oregon's long term economic health. Carefully examining the language and implementation of HB 4148 is our responsibility, and it will be essential to ensure that tourism destinations, DMOs, and the broader economy of the state of Oregon remain viable and able to sustain future visitors as well as prospective residents.

Thank you for your time and for considering the serious implications this bill would have for Bend and communities across Oregon.

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