

Chair Meek, Vice-Chair Drazan, and members of the committee,

My name is Laura Anne Butler, and I am a business owner, licensed guide, science educator, and promoter of outdoor recreation with Rock Your World, LLC in Lincoln City, Oregon.

I strongly support the Oregon Recreation Commerce and Affordability Act of 2026, SB 1593.

My business provides guiding and recreational opportunities for both tourists and local residents. I am also a former Skibowl employee and a lifelong nature lover, from spending time alone in the woods to riding the alpine slide at Skibowl, to engaging in snow sports and other coordinated recreational activities. This work is deeply personal to me, but it is also economically essential to the communities I serve.

Outdoor recreation is not optional income for places like the Oregon Coast and Mount Hood communities. It is tourism money. It creates jobs, pays bills, and keeps communities functioning. Without tourism revenue, these towns cannot survive.

Like many recreation operators across Oregon, I am under increasing pressure from rising insurance premiums, legal uncertainty, and the real risk of losing coverage entirely. Even reduced or truncated insurance coverage can limit the types of outdoor experiences I am able to safely offer. If Oregon's recreation liability framework is not fixed, many operators will simply be unable to continue.

The lack of enforceable liability waivers creates serious downstream effects. It increases costs, lowers wages, limits programming, and raises prices for the public. More importantly, it removes personal accountability from participants who knowingly choose to engage in activities that carry inherent risk. Liability waivers exist to acknowledge that reality.

If an incident occurs and insurance coverage is reduced or denied, a single participant's poor decision could destroy an entire business, regardless of how skilled, cautious, or well-trained the guide or operator may be. From my experience working on Mount Hood and along the Oregon Coast, most people will do what they want to do despite reasonable warnings. There must be shared responsibility when choosing to recreate in inherently hazardous environments such as mountains or the ocean shore.

Commercial guides and operators actually make recreation safer. We reduce search and rescue calls, improve public safety through education and structure, and protect first responders by helping people engage in these environments responsibly. It is far safer for people to participate through licensed commercial operators than to attempt these activities alone without training or context.

This is a long-standing issue that has become urgent. Oregon can no longer ignore it. We must face it head on.

SB 1593 offers a measured, balanced, and proven solution. Oregon is currently an outlier among Western states and is out of alignment with the federal government.

Every other Western state recognizes enforceable liability waivers as part of a functioning recreation economy. Oregon itself used to do so. At the same time, Oregon already maintains some of the strictest guiding and licensing requirements in the country. Visitor and resident safety can be protected through licensure and professional standards, rather than by refusing to honor liability waivers.

Bringing Oregon back into alignment with surrounding states is critical for stability, affordability, and the survival of our outdoor recreation sector.

I also support the provision for an economic study to better quantify Oregon's outdoor recreation economy. While statewide figures matter, it is essential to recognize that certain communities depend almost entirely on recreation activity.

Places like Government Camp, Timberline Lodge, and surrounding Mount Hood communities exist because of recreation.

Timberline Lodge itself, a historic structure built by the CCC, depends on active recreation. Without skiing, guiding, and outdoor activities, there is little reason for people to travel to 6,000 feet simply for lunch or lodging. If recreation activity disappears, Timberline Lodge goes cold, and the surrounding communities follow.

Thank you for championing SB 1593 and for recognizing the importance of outdoor recreation access and affordability in Oregon. I am grateful for your leadership and look forward to continuing to help people safely engage with and care for Oregon's incredible landscapes.

Respectfully,

Laura Anne Butler
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Lincoln City, Oregon