

February 9, 2026

Dear Respected Committee Chair and Members,

My name is Justin Waldron, and I serve as the Director of Travel Pendleton, the DMO for Pendleton, Oregon. I respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to House Bill 4148.

Pendleton is a rural community where tourism is not supplemental, it is foundational. Visitor spending supports local hotels, restaurants, retailers, cultural organizations, and a hospitality workforce that is interwoven with the health of our broader economy. In communities like ours, transient lodging tax revenues are not excess funds; they are a reinvestment in one of the few industries capable of generating outside dollars at scale.

HB 4148 would allow local lodging tax revenues to be redirected away from tourism promotion and destination management toward general city or county services. While flexibility may benefit larger or more diversified communities, this shift would have serious and unintended consequences for rural, tourism-dependent places like Pendleton.

Travel Pendleton's core function is to create demand—especially during off-peak and shoulder seasons when rural economies are most vulnerable. These are the months when hotels struggle to maintain occupancy, restaurants reduce hours, and seasonal workers face uncertainty. Tourism promotion during these periods is not discretionary spending; it is economic stabilization.

I have been in my role for just over a year, and during that time I have seen firsthand how small changes in visitation can have outsized impacts in a rural setting. A single event weekend can mean the difference between staff being hired or laid off, between a business staying open or closing early for the season. Hospitality interactions—front desks, waitstaff, event volunteers—are often the first and most lasting impression visitors have of Pendleton, and they directly influence whether those visitors return or recommend our community to others.

Recognizing the seasonal challenges rural destinations face, Travel Pendleton has introduced a new multi-day cultural event specifically designed to extend our tourism season, attract new visitors, and build long-term demand. These efforts take time, consistency, and sustained investment. Diverting lodging tax revenues away from tourism would undermine this work and weaken our ability to grow Pendleton's economy responsibly and sustainably.

We acknowledge that cities and counties across Oregon have legitimate and pressing funding needs. However, rural tourism economies should not be asked to solve those challenges by dismantling the very system that generates their economic activity. Lodging tax revenues exist because visitors choose to come here and using those dollars for unrelated purposes risks breaking the cycle that sustains rural communities.

For Pendleton and many communities like it, tourism is one of the few economic development tools available that does not require significant public infrastructure investment. Weakening destination marketing organizations would reduce visitation, suppress job growth, and limit rural communities' ability to remain economically resilient.

For these reasons, Travel Pendleton respectfully urges the Legislature to oppose HB 4148 and to protect the intended use of transient lodging tax revenues as a driver of rural economic health, workforce stability, and community vitality.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this perspective and for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Justin Waldron
Director, Travel Pendleton
Pendleton, Oregon