

Submitter: Mary Faith Bell
On Behalf Of: Tillamook County
Committee: House Committee On Revenue
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4148

Dear Chair Nathanson, Vice-Chair Reschke, Vice-Chair Walters, and Esteemed Committee Members,

Remember the devastating Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami in 2004? Remember Banda Aceh? Most people who saw the heartbreaking, horrifying videos of tsunami waves wiping out beach communities full of locals and tourists alike will never forget.

That could happen here. The Oregon coast is a worldwide tourism destination drawing millions of visitors each year. We are also at risk for a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami of potentially similar magnitude as the Indian Ocean event in 2004, or the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami in 2011.

As a Tillamook County Commissioner and liaison to emergency management I am actively engaged in preparedness and resilience efforts for our coastal communities. We are doing amazing work, largely led by superb volunteer groups in cooperation with city, county, and state resources. This work is essential, and underfunded.

Imagine if we have emergency food, shelter, and medical supplies for 1500 residents of Rockaway Beach, and disaster strikes in July, when thousands of visitors far outnumber locals. It will be pandemonium. Best case scenario is that supplies intended to last for three weeks could be used in a matter of days, long before help arrives.

We need to invest in emergency preparedness planning and supplies for visitors as well as locals. HB 4148 would give local governments greater latitude in discretionary spending of transient lodging tax revenues. Coastal communities could use some of the revenue to fund emergency supplies for the visitors who are paying the tax, which makes perfect sense. Local citizens and taxpayers should not have to fund preparedness supplies for visitors with fundraisers, donations, and property taxes.

Planning for the needs of tens of thousands of summertime visitors in the event of a disaster is beyond the scope of what we can fund. It is just that simple. We want to be able to take care of people when they are here, and we can't afford to. Please give us the latitude to use tourism revenues that are generated here to be ready when disaster happens.

Thank you for your consideration,

Mary Faith Bell
Tillamook County Commissioner