

Submitter: Ken Engelman
On Behalf Of: McKenzie River Reflections
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Capital Construction
Measure, Appointment or SB5701
Topic:

February 13, 2026

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means

Re: SB 5701 – Support for Funding the McKenzie River Discovery Center

Dear Co-Chairs Fred Girod and Rob Nosse, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to express my strong support for Senate Bill 5701 and funding for the McKenzie River Discovery Center.

My name is Ken Engelman, and I have published the weekly McKenzie River Reflections newspaper for 48 years. I support this investment because the Discovery Center will strengthen both the economic vitality of our region and the flow of cultural, historical, and community information that local journalism depends upon to serve the McKenzie Valley's nine unincorporated communities.

Since the 2020 Holiday Farm Fire, our area has endured profound ecological damage and significant economic hardship. Homes and businesses were lost, tourism declined, families relocated, and recovery has been slow and uneven. The McKenzie River Discovery Center represents a thoughtful, forward-looking investment in rural resilience and long-term recovery.

Designed to welcome up to 50,000 visitors each year, the Center is projected to generate approximately \$7 million annually in regional economic activity—supporting local lodging, restaurants, outfitters, guides, and small businesses. The project will transform the historic hatchery site into a vibrant, year-round destination centered on education, heritage tourism, and environmental stewardship. Through its partnership with OMSI, the Center will offer nationally respected, hands-on exhibits that attract visitors from across Oregon and beyond—and encourage them to return again and again.

Equally important, this investment supports the broader ecosystem that allows local journalism and civic life to thrive. Strong communities depend on trusted local information, and projects like the Discovery Center help sustain the economic and cultural foundations that make that possible.

I respectfully urge your support for SB 5701 and funding for the McKenzie River Discovery Center. Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to Oregon's rural communities.

Sincerely,

Ken Engelman

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