

Submitter: Devon Lawson  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4097

Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Nash, and Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Devon Lawson. I am testifying in opposition to HB 4097.

While I strongly support the mission of the Oregon Ocean Science Trust, I fundamentally oppose the mechanism proposed in this bill. Authorizing a state agency to create a private 501(c)(3) nonprofit to fund its operations is a dangerous slide toward the privatization of public science and the erosion of legislative oversight.

The Oregon Legislature, through the Ways & Means process, is supposed to control state agencies' budgets. This ensures accountability to the voters. HB 4097 creates a "trapdoor" in that process. By establishing a nonprofit arm, the Trust can raise and spend millions of dollars outside the Legislature's purview. It creates a shadow budget. Ask yourself who will donate to this nonprofit. It will likely be large, well-funded interest groups who want to influence state policy. Do we want outside interest groups effectively paying the salaries or funding the specific studies that drive Oregon's regulatory decisions? This invites "pay-to-play" science.

Science is never neutral; it is directed by funding. If the State refuses to fund ocean monitoring and instead tells the agency to "go find donors," the agency becomes beholden to those donors. If an offshore energy developer or a massive seafood conglomerate becomes the primary donor to this nonprofit, can we trust the "neutrality" of the research produced? Even if the influence is subtle, the appearance of conflict is disastrous. Public science must be funded by public tax dollars, untainted by private profit motives or special-interest agendas. This bill invites regulatory capture by the highest bidder.

This bill is an admission of failure. It says that the State of Oregon does not value its ocean resources enough to pay for their protection. Instead of taxing the industries that extract wealth from our coast to pay for this research, we are handing the agency a tin cup and telling them to beg. We should not be creating "Friends of the Ocean Trust" nonprofits; we should be fully funding the Department of State Lands through the General Fund.

HB 4097 solves a funding problem by creating an integrity problem. I urge you to vote No and instead push for a direct General Fund allocation to the Trust in the next

budget cycle.

Thank you.