

River Drifters

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March 2, 2026

Dear Chair Bowman, Vice-Chairs Elmer and Pham, and Members of the Committee,

RE: Opposition to SB 1517 — Support for SB 1593 (Oregon Recreation Commerce and Affordability Act)

My name is Tim Thornton, and I am a guide and owner of River Drifters, an outdoor recreation company that has been guiding Oregonians and visitors down the Deschutes and other magnificent rivers of Oregon and Washington for 47 years. Since our founding, we have proudly shown our passion for the incredible rivers of Oregon. Many thousands of guests — families, first-timers, veterans, school groups, and adventure seekers — through some of the most breathtaking whitewater in the Pacific Northwest.

SB 1517 Would Make a Bad Situation Worse

I am writing to urge you to oppose SB 1517 and to support SB 1593 as the appropriate legislative remedy to the liability crisis facing Oregon's outdoor recreation industry.

Oregon's courts have increasingly refused to enforce liability waivers — the signed agreements our guests complete before participating in inherently risky outdoor activities. The resulting legal uncertainty has driven up our insurance costs dramatically, made coverage harder to obtain, and placed the long-term viability of operations like ours in genuine jeopardy. The current situation is unsustainable.

SB 1517-7, as currently written, would not solve this problem — it would make it worse. Rather than restoring the enforceability of liability waivers, SB 1517 as written would leave outfitters in an even more precarious legal position than we are in today. We cannot afford to wait another session for a solution that may never come, only to find ourselves worse off.

What We Are Asking For — And What We Are Not

We are not asking for immunity. We are not asking for a free pass. We take responsibility for our operations seriously, and we would never seek to deny a guest a legitimate avenue to pursue justice when genuine negligence has occurred.

What we are asking for is the same common-sense legal framework that every neighboring state uses — and that Oregon itself used for decades. SB 1593, the Oregon Recreation Commerce and Affordability Act, provides exactly that. It would

restore the enforceability of liability waivers as a matter of public policy, while preserving guests' rights to pursue claims where actual negligence is demonstrated. It is balanced, well-tested, and fair.

Washington, Idaho, and California all operate under frameworks that allow outdoor recreation businesses to use enforceable waivers. Oregon's failure to do the same has put our outfitters at a competitive disadvantage and placed the future of an entire industry at risk.

The Stakes Are Real and the Clock Is Running

River Drifters has endured flooding events, wildfires, a global pandemic, and every economic cycle the last five decades could throw at us. We have always found a way to keep our doors open and our guides on the river to provide a guided service to the public. But the legal and insurance environment created by the current waiver uncertainty is a threat unlike any we have faced before — not because of a natural disaster or market forces, but because of a policy gap the legislature has the power to fix.

If the legislature does not act this session to restore waiver enforceability, there will be outfitters across Oregon who will not survive to see the 2027 season. That is not hyperbole — it is the reality facing small businesses like ours that operate on thin seasonal margins and cannot absorb runaway insurance costs or existential litigation risk.

Please **oppose** SB 1517 in its current form and support SB 1593 as the right solution for Oregon's outdoor recreation industry. We want nothing more than to keep showing people Oregon's rivers — safely, professionally, and with the full confidence that we are operating on a level legal playing field.

Thank you for your leadership and your willingness to listen to the small businesses and working Oregonians who depend on a healthy outdoor recreation economy.

Respectfully,

Tim Thornton
Guide/Owner River Drifters
Maupin, Oregon
riverdrifters.net