

Submitter: Emmy Andrews
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1517

Dear Chair Bowman, Vice-Chairs Elmer and Pham, and members of the committee,

Non-governmental organizations that maintain trails on public lands need liability waiver reform to continue to do what we do. More than 80% of Oregonians use trails to enjoy nature and NGOs are the driving force behind keeping those trails maintained. We removed tens of thousands of trees that fall across trails every year, cut back encroaching brush, manage trail tread to prevent erosion, and so much more. We have small staffs and small budgets and primarily use volunteers to do this critical work.

Recreational liability protections are critical to fulfilling our missions as recreation providers. Federal and state public agencies are facing budget and staffing shortfalls that leave them without capacity to do this work. That means if NGOs don't do it, it won't get done, and Oregonians will lose access to public lands and to the outdoor recreation experience they love. But without reasonable recreational liability protections, donor-funded NGOs risk financial ruin simply to do routine trail maintenance work.

Outdoor recreation is in Oregon's blood, and we desperately need liability waiver reform that aligns Oregon's laws with other states. That will allow us to keep access to public lands open and remain viable as entities that steward outdoor recreation infrastructure (e.g., trails, signage, trailheads) and experiences (e.g. raft guides, shuttle companies).

This session we have consistently shared our support for the policy language in SB 1593A as a workable solution that would meet our needs.

SB 1517-7 as currently written will not provide our organizations and our volunteer board officers with reasonable security for routine work. There is no protection for stewardship activities and the many explicit exceptions to what can be included in waivers would put us at even greater risk than the already untenable status quo.

However we would be supportive of moving SB 1517 forward with the -A11 or -A15 amendments. The -A11 amendment contains the language we've been asking for throughout the session (thank you!), and we're also willing to trade the certainties of SB 1593A for the broad applicability of -A15 if that is the legislature's route toward a compromise.

Recreational liability protections enhance public safety by ensuring that outfitters, volunteer coordinators, and other trained professionals are able to continue to effectively lead group programming in the outdoors and steward Oregon's natural spaces we treasure.

Thanks for working to understand our perspective and how these proposed regulations would affect our work.

And thank you for your leadership within our great state.