



March 3, 2026

Bill and Committee– SB 1517A, House Rules Committee

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

On behalf of the Willamette Valley Visitors Association, I respectfully submit testimony in **opposition to SB 1517 as written.**

WVVA represents communities, lodging providers, and visitor-facing businesses across seven counties in the Willamette Valley, including southwest Clackamas, Yamhill, Marion, Polk, Linn, Benton, and non-coastal Lane counties. Our role is to support sustainable tourism as an economic development tool—one that creates jobs, supports small businesses, and helps communities reinvest in infrastructure, facilities, and quality of life improvements that benefit both visitors and residents.

WVVA strongly believes the State of Oregon needs liability waiver reform. Recreational liability protections enhance public safety by ensuring that outfitters, volunteer coordinators, and other trained professionals are able to continue effectively guiding group programming in the outdoors and stewarding the natural spaces Oregonians treasure.

Liability waiver reform would help align Oregon's laws with those of other states, reducing costs and creating greater certainty for small organizations. **SB 1517-A, as currently written, will not provide guides, outfitters, personal gyms, stewardship organizations, or volunteer board officers with greater security, nor will it reduce insurance costs. The bill provides no protection for stewardship activities, and the many explicit exceptions to what can be included in waivers would place organizations at even greater risk than the already untenable status quo.**

Leaving outfitters, guides, and gyms unprotected negatively affects a large segment of Oregon's small businesses, particularly in rural communities, and makes it harder and more expensive for people to access the outdoors. What ski areas are currently experiencing is only the tip of the iceberg. Oregon has become one of the most difficult states in which to operate an outdoor recreation business. Insurance premiums and legal costs are rising at an unsustainable pace, and options for coverage are rapidly disappearing.

However, WVVA would support moving SB 1517 forward with either the -A11 or -A15 amendments. The -A11 amendment contains the language we have consistently requested. We are also willing to trade the certainties of SB 1593-A for the broader applicability of the -A15 amendment, should that be the Legislature's preferred path toward compromise.

Recreational liability protections are critical to fulfilling the missions of trails stewardship organizations and outdoor recreation providers. As you know, both federal and state public agencies responsible for maintaining public lands are facing severe budget and staffing shortfalls. Meanwhile, non-governmental organizations are doing everything possible to continue running programs that create safe and welcoming access to the

outdoors for all Oregonians, while mobilizing and training volunteers to maintain trails and waterways for safety, access, and ecosystem health.

If we continue down this path—if we continue to delay a truly comprehensive solution—costs for participants will continue to rise, wages will not keep pace, small family-owned businesses will disappear, and guided recreation in Oregon will become accessible only to the wealthiest individuals, provided primarily by large corporations with extensive legal resources.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tori Middelstadt

Tori Middelstadt
Executive Director
Willamette Valley Visitors Association