



**March 17, 2025**

**Name:** Liz Dahlager, Chief Operating Officer, Merete Hotel Management

**Bill Number and Committee:** Opposition to HB3556 – Testimony to the House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government and Veterans

Dear Chair Tran, Vice-Chairs Dacia Grayber and Rick Lewis, and members of the House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government and Veterans -

Throughout my 25+ year hotel career I have worked in hotels in downtown Portland and the Oregon coast, and now am an owner of and operate a hotel management company. Mereté Hotel Management, based in Lane County, operates 20 branded hotels across the state including Hood River, Bend, Roseburg, Grants Pass, Eugene, Springfield, Medford, Central Point and Hermiston. I have worked alongside regional Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and Travel Oregon in multiple locations across Oregon and seen firsthand the impact of a strong tourism economy on our communities. I appreciate the opportunity to convey to you my strong opposition to HB 3556.

Tourism is a critical catalyst for economic growth and prosperity – generating jobs, increasing visitor spend, and supporting strong municipal tax revenues. DMOs focus their tourism development and marketing programs on *non-peak* travel seasons because they know the importance of leveling the seasonality of tourism to create year-round job security and stability in our communities. That stability helps DMOs build a healthy tourism economy and implement local programs that are reflective of Oregon's values.

I won't list all the specifics as I'm sure many of my colleagues will educate you on the many, many projects, promotions, events, attractions, venues and programs that support our vibrant visitor industry. But I will say this – as an Oregonian, a business owner, and a member of the hospitality industry, the purpose of TLT (Transient Lodging Tax) is to support our local economy through generating visitor spending and increased visitation. Diverting these funds for other purposes (even good ones) sets the stage for this investment to evaporate and puts everything the state has gained, and will gain, at tremendous risk.

Oregon has a lot of challenges, but tourism is a bright spot in a state that has faced criticism of its social policy and is not recognized as a “business-friendly” state. To be blunt these perceptions have hurt our industry resulting in a decline in business travel that is generated locally and the failed progressive social policies have taken a financial toll especially in downtown Portland but also in Bend and Eugene. And now, an industry we have that's working – that's bringing money into our local economies, we want to take that funding and allocate it elsewhere? In addition to causing further revenue declines to those businesses what would happen to the employees, the families, the restauranters, hoteliers, retailers, tour guides, and all the others who welcome visitors to their place of business? At the state level, tourism has become a bedrock of Oregon's economy, with “Retail, Accommodation and Food Services” being **the second top category of employer** after healthcare and social assistance (Reference IBIS World 2024 report). As an Executive Board

Member for the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association, I can assure you the last thing our Oregon business owners need is for the state to take their eye off the ball and let our tourism industry stumble.

Your opposition to HB3556 will allow us, and your many, many constituents who benefit from a vibrant tourism economy, to continue to make strategic investment in projects and programs that support Oregon's economy. It will allow us to continue to keep our employees working year-round and it supports a strong, bright future for our state.

I appreciate your support of the tourism constituency and ask that you choose to be good stewards of Oregon's economic viability by voting against HB3556.

Thank you for the privilege of submitting this testimony for your consideration.

*Liz Dahlager*

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