

Submitter: Shawn Benson
On Behalf Of: Prineville Crook COunty Chamber of COmmerce
Committee: House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3556

Dear Chair Tran, Vice-Chair Grayber, Vice-Chair Lewis, and members of the House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans, I serve as President for the Prineville – Crook County Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center. I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB 3556 on behalf of our Chamber's Board of Directors and staff.

As a dedicated advocate for our local economy and community growth, I have seen firsthand how vital tourism is to Prineville and Crook County. Our region's natural beauty, outdoor recreation, and cultural heritage make it a prime destination for visitors, and strategic investment in tourism has played a crucial role in strengthening our economy.

Collaboration between our organization, Visit Central Oregon, and Travel Oregon has been essential in driving economic growth and creating jobs in rural areas like ours. Over the past few years, we have worked diligently to expand tourism development and marketing efforts, particularly during non-peak travel seasons. This strategy has helped provide year-round job security, stabilize local businesses, and sustain our economy. As a result, we have successfully launched community-focused programs that align with Oregon's values.

For example, the Transient Room Tax (TRT) has been instrumental in funding the creation of Explore Prineville, which has significantly enhanced our ability to promote Prineville as a travel destination. This funding allowed us to develop a comprehensive marketing strategy, expanding our reach and attracting more visitors to our area. The success of Explore Prineville has not only strengthened our tourism efforts but also created new jobs within our organization. The increased demand for tourism services has enabled us to hire additional staff to manage these responsibilities, further benefiting the local economy. TRT funding has proven invaluable in driving both tourism growth and employment in Prineville.

In the past five years alone, TRT funding for our organization has increased by 152%, adding over \$110,000 to our operating budget. This substantial growth has allowed us to expand our programs, create new jobs, and better serve both residents and visitors alike. Reducing or eliminating this crucial funding would threaten the momentum we've worked so hard to build and put future projects and partnerships at risk.

I urge you to oppose HB 3556 to ensure continued investment in Oregon's tourism industry. Your support will allow our organization to maintain strategic planning efforts, sustain vital programs, and continue promoting Prineville and Crook County as vibrant travel destinations.

Thank you for your time and for considering this testimony. We are committed to

supporting the growth and livability of our community while preserving the natural beauty that makes Crook County so special.

Sincerely,
Shawn Benson
Board President
Prineville – Crook County Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center