

March 18, 2025

To: Chair Tran, Vice-Chair Grayber, Vice-Chair Lewis, and Members of the House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans

Subject: Opposition to House Bill 3556

As a dedicated advocate for tourism in Crook County, I am writing to express my strong opposition to House Bill 3556.

Tourism is a vital component of Prineville and Crook County's economy, significantly contributing to local businesses, job creation, and the overall quality of life in our region. Our area's natural attractions, recreational opportunities, and cultural heritage make it a desirable destination. Strategic investments in tourism have been crucial in strengthening our economy, particularly the success of our lodging sector.

The collaborative efforts of our local Destination Marketing Organization, Explore Prineville, in conjunction with Visit Central Oregon and Travel Oregon, have been instrumental in expanding tourism development and marketing initiatives, especially during off-peak seasons. These endeavors promote year-round visitation, fostering job stability, supporting small businesses, and ensuring a sustainable economy. Tourism funds and Explore Prineville's initiatives have directly contributed to the growth and prosperity of our lodging industry through targeted marketing, destination enhancement, and event promotion.

Explore Prineville has effectively utilized tourism funds to develop and expand events that benefit both visitors and residents. These events stimulate business for hotels, restaurants, and retail establishments, supporting the livelihoods of Crook County residents. Their focus on promoting year-round recreation has also been essential in maintaining occupancy rates during shoulder seasons, ensuring consistent economic impact beyond peak periods. I have personally observed how Tourism Lodging Tax (TLT) funded advertising and marketing campaigns generate visitor spending, positively impacting both individual businesses and the broader community.

The benefits of a thriving tourism industry in Crook County extend beyond economic metrics. It contributes to a stronger, more vibrant, and resilient community. Maintaining the current TLT distribution is essential to sustaining this positive momentum. The passage of HB 3556 could potentially undermine the economic stability it intends to support.

Therefore, I strongly urge you to oppose House Bill 3556 to ensure continued investment in Oregon's tourism industry. Your support will enable our community to maintain strategic tourism initiatives, preserve job growth, and further establish Prineville and Crook County as a premier travel destination.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony. We remain committed to supporting the growth, sustainability, and livability of our community while preserving the natural beauty that defines Crook County.

Sincerely,

Michele O'Hara, Development Director

