



May 13, 2021

Oregon Public Utility Commission
201 High Street SE, Suite 100
Salem, OR 97301-3398

RE: Relief for Small Businesses

Chair Decker, Commissioner Tawney and Commissioner Thompson,

For the record, my name is Greg Astley, Director of Government Affairs for the Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association, writing today on behalf of the over 10,000 food service establishments and over 2000 lodging properties across the state of Oregon.

Oregon's restaurants and lodging properties have been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting steps taken to help prevent the spread of the disease.

From travel restrictions early on to limits on the number of people able to meet or gather to complete shutdowns of eating establishments, Oregon's hospitality industry has suffered like no other.

According to the Oregon Employment Department, from December 2019 to December 2020, Oregon's Leisure and Hospitality sector lost 38.7% of jobs compared to 9.1% across all other industries.

We hope our state is done with the yo-yoing of counties not able to allow indoor dining for our members, but we can't be sure.

With little to no revenue, restaurants have tried to be innovative to keep employees on payroll and continue to keep their doors open but it has been tremendously difficult for most.

On top of that, fixed costs such as rent, utilities and fees are still due every month.

Relief for small commercial ratepayers like restaurants, bars and lodging properties is another key piece of the recovery puzzle for our members and the hospitality sector as a whole.

Restaurants and lodging properties are not projected to fully recover until at least 2022, maybe 2023, if ever, in some cases. We have already lost approximately 800-1000 restaurants in the last thirteen months who could not survive the impacts of this global pandemic.

At a time when the hospitality sector is still struggling to stay afloat and as we start to make progress toward recovery, we would ask you to consider the following steps to help our operators:

- Place a moratorium on disconnections of service during this public health emergency
 - Much like the commercial foreclosure moratorium passed in the first special session of 2020, Oregon's small businesses need time to recover and bring in revenue in order to pay their bills. A moratorium on disconnections can help provide the window of time needed to accomplish this and allow small businesses to stay in operation and employ workers.
- Convene a workgroup comprised of PUC Commissioners, staff, small business stakeholders and utilities to evaluate the impacts of COVID-19 on these small operators
 - Our understanding is the impacts of COVID-19 on commercial ratepayers is still being determined. Creating a workgroup to more fully vet these impacts and the long-term consequences will not only help provide guidance and direction now but may help in the future if a similar public emergency is declared.
- Develop a plan to help eliminate bad debt incurred by small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic and the state of emergency
 - With funds available from the federal government through the American Relief Plan Act or other sources, these small business arrearages could be eliminated.

Based on data from the Oregon Department of Energy Biennial Report, restaurants are particularly energy use intensive, and may need additional assistance.

Our neighbors to the north and south, Washington and California respectively, have led the way by declaring moratoriums on commercial disconnections. Oregon should follow suit to protect small business operators and allow them the time needed to pull through this crisis and help Oregon's economy prosper once again.

Thank you.

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