



May 18, 2015

Testimony to House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness
Provided by: Paloma Sparks, Legislative Director, Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries

The Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) appreciates the opportunity to testify in opposition to Senate Bill 87 A, which significantly rolls back the protections afforded to veterans under the current veterans' preference law.

The Bureau enforces the current veterans' preference in public employment under our civil rights laws. Our approach to veterans' hiring ensures that veterans have a fair and meaningful shot at a job while providing clarity to employers seeking to navigate Oregon's law.

In 2014, this committee directed BOLI to lead a workgroup to review veterans' preference. The correspondence from the committee states that it was the "legislature's intent that qualified veterans should be interviewed." We agree.

Early on, the workgroup reached consensus on the goal of ensuring that veterans are being afforded opportunities to compete for public sector jobs and are given the chance to demonstrate how their transferrable skills qualify them for jobs. The workgroup also discussed some definitional issues to help clarify the law. During this process, a subgroup discussed definitions and met to draft a proposed policy statement. The documents that resulted were helpful to the discussion. However, the subgroup proposed a number of significant policy changes that concerned BOLI.

SB 87 A allows public employers to narrow the number of veterans who are able to compete for positions. The reality is that veterans have given much in public service and should be offered chances to serve the public once their time serving in the military is complete. Too often, employers do not understand how military skills and experience transfer to civilian jobs. Veterans must be afforded opportunities to explain to employers how their military service help to make them qualified for positions.

Our strong position is that every *qualified* veteran should be interviewed and that the preference should apply at every stage of the hiring process. As an agency dedicated to protecting the rights of veterans, it is our belief that the existing law should not be scaled back to change either existing protection.

There is room for compromise with some members of the workgroup to clarify the definition of "qualified" and other modifications to current law. But, many parts of veterans preference law are still new and employers should work hard to make them work rather than rewriting the law altogether.

I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 87 or adopt significant amendments to change the bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer questions.

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