



February 11, 2019

Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Knopp and Members of the Senate Workforce Committee,

I urge your strong support for Senate Bill 726, known as the Oregon Workplace Fairness Act.

Forward Together works in Oregon and nationally to win rights, recognition and resources for all families. Since our founding in 1989, we have continually fought to dismantle the ways our society marginalizes us based on race, gender and sexuality. Today, we build courage and foster connection among our multi-racial community of change makers to secure the rights, recognition and resources all families need to thrive. SB 726 takes a much needed step in that work by addressing some common sense changes to workforce sexual harassment in Oregon.

Sexual harassment is all too common, and unfortunately, is not reported enough, that's why it's important to create policies that protect victims from retaliation and hold individual harassers accountable. Due to our country's history of exploitation of working people and racial stereotypes Women of color, LGBTQ folks of color and indigenous women have been more susceptible to sexual harassment and assault than White women have been.

Black women in particular experience workplace sexual harassment at disproportionate rates compared to white women. According to a recent report by the National Women's Law Center, Black women only make up 15.7% of women workers in administration, support, waste management & remediation services (a category that includes a wide and disparate range of occupations from janitors and grounds keeping workers to office clerks and security guards) but file 40.9 percent of sexual harassment charges filed by women in that industry. 1 in 3 women who filed sexual harassment charges also alleged retaliation.¹ Knowing that only a small portion of victims ever report their harassment, this is an alarming rate of reports.

Within the LGBTQ community, transgender people and bisexual women face the most alarming rates of sexual violence. For LGBTQ survivors, because of the stigmatization of

¹ <https://nwlc.org/resources/out-of-the-shadows-an-analysis-of-sexual-harassment-charges-filed-by-working-women/>



their relationships and the discrimination they face surrounding their identities, often are hesitant to seek help or file a report when they've been sexually harassed at work. According to the National Center for Transgender Equality, Transgender Americans are three times as likely to be unemployed and twice as likely to live in poverty. 47% have reported being unfairly fired or denied employment because of their gender identity.² 85% of victim advocates surveyed by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs reported having worked with an LGBTQ survivor who was denied services because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. All of these factors contribute to under reporting sexual harassment or assault for fear of retaliation, which we know can be helped by putting protections in place.

A disproportionate number of Transgender people of color are represented when we look at those who have faced sexual assault or harassment: Among people of color, American Indian (65%), multiracial (59%), Middle Eastern (58%), and Black (53%) respondents of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey were most likely to have been sexually assaulted or faced sexual harassment in their lifetime.

Started by Black feminist Tarana Burke, #MeToo is a powerful way to address the shame, stigma and doubt that many survivors of assault and harassment face. It is a cultural moment of reckoning, and it's important to take action in the wake of so many who have been effected sexual harassment or assault.

We urge your support of SB 726.

Sincerely,

Michele Ruffin

Oregon Advocacy Manager

Forward Together

² <http://www.transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS%20Full%20Report%20-%20FINAL%201.6.17.pdf>