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Governor



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Testimony in Support of SB 726
February 12, 2019, HR D, 8 am
Senate Committee on Workforce

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Knopp, and Senators Golden, Hansell, and Monnes Anderson:

The Oregon Commission for Women (OCFW), in its role as advocate for the women of Oregon, strongly supports SB 726, The Oregon Workplace Fairness Act.

The OCFW supports SB 726 as the proposed legislation would provide better protection for workers who have faced discrimination in the workplace. Experience has shown that current laws do not go far enough to protect harassment victims at work, especially for those victims who are women of color and those in low wage industries.

This bill has many important features but those of significance to women include: preventing employers from asking for non-disclosure agreements that relate to discrimination at the time of hiring, during settlement, and severance negotiations; extending statute of limitations for discrimination in employment situations from one to seven years; and, directing BOLI to create policies and procedures for employees and employers that relate to sexual harassment.

While women are the predominant victims of harassment, women of color are disproportionately harassed. According to EEOC, at least one in four women experience sexual harassment at work. Eighty-two percent of EEOC charges were filed by women and 75% of women experience retaliation when they reported it. Women of color experience even more of a culture of, filing 56% of harassment claims while making up 37% of the workforce. Black women specifically are three times more likely to file a claim of harassment than their white counterparts. Women in low wage industries are especially vulnerable as they are most likely to experience harassment in the workplace with the least knowledge about potential recourse options.

This legislation would begin to create a workplace environment where all women in Oregon can work with fairness, dignity and respect. In building a framework of accountable policies and procedures, SB 726 is an important step toward workplace safety. The Oregon Commission for Women supports SB 726 because this bill is critical to promoting a harassment-free workplace culture for Oregon women and commends the committee's leadership and its members for its work on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Dr. Barbara Spencer, OCFW Chair

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