

Date: 2/12/19

To: Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Knopp, Members of the Senate Committee on Workforce

From: Simone Crowe

RE: Support for SB 726, The Oregon Workplace Fairness Act

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Knopp and members of the Senate Workforce Committee:

I support Senate Bill 726 which would better protect workers that have faced discrimination in the workplace. I know that current laws don't go far enough to protect harassment victims at work and I support SB 726 because I have faced harassment in the workplace.

I was only 19 years old, so I had only worked a few summers when I took the job as a waitress at a corporate restaurant chain. That summer, I was repeatedly sexually harassed. It started off with comments from the 30-something-year-old Chef about my appearance, which I mostly managed to shrug off. One day, during service, we happened to be in the walk-in at the same time, and grabbed my butt. Later, he asked me out on a date. I remember feeling very nervous and turning him down, but I honestly don't remember what I said or how he responded.

That summer, I found myself warding off two additional male coworkers who would hit on me, bring me romantic presents at work, and ask me on dates.

Even though I wanted to be able to just do my job, I didn't consider saying anything to management. It didn't even cross my mind that a corporate restaurant chain would be equipped with how to handle my complaints. This was one of my first jobs after all. The other reason I didn't say anything was because the Chef genuinely scared me. I knew, without question, that speaking up would make my job and life harder. It might put my job at risk, and my body in danger. It wasn't worth it. So, I kept my head down.

Fast forward a couple of years, working at a different restaurant, and I witnessed more sexual harassment. The restaurant owner would come in about twice a month and hit on my friend, a waitress. He would rub the back of her neck and touch her waist, saying inappropriate things. She complained to our in-house manager and he said there wasn't anything he could do because that would mean standing up to his boss, the owner. A few months later, that same middle-aged manager started confessing his love for a 20-year-old waitress, and calling her at all hours of the night. As I witnessed this, I told myself that I was right to keep my mouth closed. That sexual harassment in the workplace was normal. This is what working was like. Later, that was confirmed by another manager telling me that I needed to wear less clothing when I was serving tables. He chastised me for wearing a cardigan and demanded that I remove it immediately, and wear a shorter skirt in the future.

Now, many years later, I recognize that these experiences have shaped the way I navigate the workplace, tiptoeing and bristling around male colleagues who show the slightest signs of flirtation. Only now, do I realize that the behavior I witnessed may have been normalized, but it

didn't have to be. I know how much worse it could have gotten, because I've experienced far worse sexual harassment outside of the workplace, more times than I can count.

I tell you this story today not in the hopes that each and everyone of you will understand my experience, and fully empathize. I don't expect all of you to fully understand what it feels like to be powerless. That's okay. I only hope you can empathize enough to vote for this bill.

Because had there been more comprehensive rights for victims and laws in place that protected employees who had been discriminated against maybe I would have felt protected enough to complain. Maybe the laws would have actually influenced the culture or at least scared off the chef. Maybe, none of this would have happened to me or my friends.

Please do not delay in preventing more sexual harassment and protecting people who have been harassed. I strongly urge you to support Senate Bill 726, the Oregon Workplace Fairness Act.