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# A STRONG VOICE FOR OREGON'S WORKERS

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TO: Co- Chairs Beyer and Gomberg  
Members of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development

FR: Graham Trainor, Oregon AFL-CIO President

RE: HB 5015 Support, BOLI Budget

March 10, 2021

The Oregon AFL-CIO represents 300,000 workers across Oregon and is a voice for all workers in the legislative process. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 5015, the Bureau of Labor and Industries's budget.

The Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) provides workers with critical services when they have concerns about their civil rights, wage and hour violations, apprenticeship or prevailing wage protections. And while Oregon's workforce has doubled since 1977, according to a June 2020 report by the National Employment Law Project, BOLI staffing was cut drastically with just 1.8 employees devoted to investigating wage claims for every 100,000 workers in the '17-'19 budget<sup>1</sup> HB 5015 makes progress to address this major capacity challenge.

We know that wage claims have increased recently and the expedient recovery of unpaid earned wages means that workers won't have to skip paying their rent or putting food on the table for their family. HB 5015 strengthens this program by adding a bilingual investigator -- a critical component to swift and comprehensive remedy for some of the workers most at-risk.

HB 5015 also allocates funds for nine new positions for the civil rights division to address discrimination, retaliation, workplace safety, workers' compensation and Oregon Family Leave Act (OFLA) violations. With this additional capacity, workers throughout the state will be well served knowing that if they face discrimination or harassment on the job that BOLI will have the resources to investigate and remedy the situation. Finally, we applaud the addition of the first Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion focused Apprenticeship position, and a new compliance specialist role.

As Oregon's economy continues to grow, the need for a properly funded Bureau of Labor and Industries is vital to ensure that workers and employers know their rights and responsibilities. HB 5015 makes significant progress to appropriately resource this critical department. However, we will note that more can be done, particularly in making sure employers actually pay their penalties, meaningful and ongoing engagement with historically and currently marginalized workers, increased resources for those who do not speak English, and more avenues and remedies for those workers who may fear retaliation for filing a complaint with a state agency.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for working Oregonians. Funding the Bureau of Labor and Industries at a more adequate level is one step the Oregon Legislature can take to help Oregon's workers find some stability in their lives. We're particularly worried about the impact underfunded agencies can have on historically and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ocpp.org/2019/03/28/2019boli-capacity-fight-wage-theft-eroded/>

currently marginalized workers. Black workers have been experiencing retaliation at alarming rates<sup>2</sup>, according to the National Employment Law Project.

As worker advocates, we often say that any good law aimed at protecting workers is only as good as it is able to be enforced. That's why we believe that is important for BOLI to investigate and enforce these issues now, and as our economy recovers. Resourcing the Bureau of Labor and Industries to swiftly, comprehensively and meaningfully enforce our state labor laws is critical to workers, employers and our economy as a whole. We respectfully request the committee support HB 5015 to ensure that the agency's budget can start to catch up with the number of Oregonians it serves.

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