



March 11, 2021

Chair Smith Warner, Vice Chairs Drazen and Holvey, and Members of the Committee.

My name is Trish Garner and I am speaking as the State Public Policy Chair for the American Association of University Women of Oregon.

This bill presents a genuine win-win opportunity for women and people from underrepresented communities, as well as for business.

From the business perspective, this bill provides companies an opportunity to take a leadership role in demonstrating that it really does endorse equity, diversity and inclusion. Research has also shown that boards with at least 30% women have higher profit margins. Diversity also increases productivity. Why is this? The more companies know about their customers, inside and out, the better they can meet their customers' needs. Diverse board members bring knowledge of expanded customer pools. They bring fresh perspectives and the ability to recruit talent from a wider base. They can champion discussion of tough issues, avoid "groupthink" and share better employee management practices. Diversity in the boardroom enhances a company's reputation.

I have heard the objection that there just aren't enough "qualified" individuals "in the pipeline" to serve on corporate boards. Frankly, I don't buy it. Taking from my own board experience, there is all too often a proclivity to suggest possible new board members from the group of people we already know or are used to seeing. But qualifications don't just mean having a business or legal background, or even knowledge of a company's products. Different perspectives and experiences bring new opportunities for corporate growth and profitability.

The picture in Oregon? It is difficult to ascertain the percentage of board members who are from underrepresented communities, but our research of large cap corporations with headquarters in Oregon shows an average of 21% women membership on Oregon's corporate boards. Oregon also has an opportunity to join 15 other states in the US which have passed or are considering similar legislation.

From the perspective of women and people from underrepresented communities, this bill presents an opportunity to demonstrate competence, communications skills, leadership. An opportunity to be heard and have that voice valued.

I also hear objections that businesses don't need one more mandate. At the outset, this bill does not impose a tax. It doesn't cover mom and pop businesses, or even close to that. Businesses have also had a generous amount of time to demonstrate their commitment to the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion. But by and large, it just hasn't happened.

And again, this bill offers opportunities for growth and profits, not onerous government regulation.

Having more than one board member from these communities will also go a long way to eliminate the "lone ranger" problem, or experiencing the challenge of being the only one in the room who is different. I know I have had the experience of being the only white person in a room and I learned a lot -- and not only how much I appreciate the honor of having been included.

To those of us who doubt this is a problem, I call your attention to the testimony of Governor Barbara Roberts who wished to testify in person but has a doctor's appointment. She tells us that although it is usual practice for governors to be offered board positions on their retirement, as a woman governor, she was not given that opportunity. She also states that this was true of many other female governors across the country. The message was clear -- corporate boards did not welcome women members.

We are all in this together. And we can all move forward together.

Thank you.

Trish Garner
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