

Testimony, House Business and Labor Committee, March 15, 2021  
Support of -1 Amendment to HB 2938, Age Discrimination TF

I am Dr. Jim Davis, representing the Stop Aging and Disability Discrimination in Employment (SADDIE) coalition, which includes: Oregon State Council for Retired Citizens; United Seniors of Oregon; Oregon Consumer League; Oregon Disabilities Commission; and the Association of Oregon Centers for Independent Living. We want to express our opposition to HB 2938 as currently written. The task force proposed in HB 2938 does not adequately represent advocates and consumers. Without more advocate/consumer involvement, advocates fear senior advocates/consumers will have less of a voice on the task force and in developing the senior employment discrimination legislation coming out that process.

We urge you to support the -1 amendment to HB 2938, which will increase advocate/consumer representation from 1 to 3 members, and add a rep for small business.

We have reached out to AARP, the bill sponsor, and were disappointed they will not support any expansion of the proposed Age Discrimination Task Force to include more advocate and consumer representation. As a matter of fact, AARP will likely be the only statewide nonprofit/advocate representative. Other groups and individuals who have been working on this issue for decades will not be allowed at the table.

Grassroots advocates, particularly our groups, have been working on the issue of age and disability discrimination in employment for many decades. We have done extensive research and met many times over the years with experts, legislators and state officials. We have fashioned many legislative concepts and were actively involved in the development of HB 2818 with our advocate leaders and consumer attorneys. Last session, we tirelessly lobbied and testified for HB 2818 before it died in this committee. We introduced HB 3277 this session around senior/disability employment discrimination. Grassroots advocates have earned the right to be at the table and plan to continue to be a very strong voice in whatever configuration ultimately exists.

Frankly, we are not totally convinced that there even needs to be a formal state task force on senior employment discrimination, especially one that is so imbalanced. We would love to see all the stakeholders on this issue be brought together to hopefully reach a compromise on legislation, with all groups and individuals who are truly concerned with this issue having an equal voice. This raises an important question: can this effort be effectively accomplished without a formal task force, possibly motivated from within the legislative process?

The effort to pass age employment discrimination legislation is too important to limit the involvement of involved stakeholders. We need a united front to fight what is such a blatant problem of age discrimination in employment. Too many work environments foster internal cultures of age and disability bias, where older workers and/or workers with disabilities are considered obsolete or unable to keep pace. For decades older workers and workers with disabilities have been pushed out of jobs, only to be replaced with less expensive younger workers. Once out of work, older workers spend a lot more time searching for employment, are requested for fewer interviews, often end up working in different professions and settling for less pay.

We hope you will support the -1 amendment that will provide a balanced task force membership that includes appropriate representation from consumers and advocates. Thank you for your consideration.