



Standing for dignity in the workplace

March 18, 2021

Testimony in Support of HB 2169

Chair Bynum, Vice-Chairs Noble and Power and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

I write in strong support of HB 2169. This bill will reform our broken and racist criminal justice system by adopting the recommendations of the Racial Justice Council that form the basis of HB 2169. NWJP is a member of the Fair Shot Coalition and we support this bill as part of our ongoing work towards achieving racial justice in Oregon.

The Northwest Workers' Justice Project provides legal representation to low-wage workers throughout the economy in sectors such as construction, building maintenance, landscaping, hotels and restaurants, food processing, agriculture and forestry. All of our clients are low-wage earners. The large majority of our clients are people of color, and most are immigrants.

Many of our immigrant clients have dealt with racism and fear of deportation for as long as they have lived in this country. Some have been deported for non-violent offenses without any opportunity for diversion. We have seen the traumatic effects of deportation too many times. We strongly support the component of this bill that makes diversion possible for immigrants accused of crime, so they can perform community service, pay restitution and/or receive treatment in their community instead of automatic deportation.

Many of our non-immigrant clients have also felt unsafe in their own communities, homes, places of worship, at school, or in public spaces due to our state's history of white supremacy, white supremacist violence, exclusion laws, curfews and systemic racism. We need to take bold steps as a state to reform our criminal justice system, where too many BIPOC people end up due to this history of white supremacy. After the long-overdue "racial reckoning" of the past year, we have begun to talk about criminal justice with an equity lens but we need to take concrete steps to undo the centuries of harm caused by white supremacy.

Restorative justice is a model that seeks to repair the harm caused by crime instead of punishing offenders. We should lead the nation in encouraging greater use of this practice with funding provided to the Criminal Justice Commission.

Black people represent 2.2 percent of Oregon's population but 9.3 percent of the state's prison population. This is because of structural racism. Black Americans are also five times more likely to be pulled over in a vehicle, even though white Americans are three times more likely to

have contraband than people of color. Profiling leads to disproportionate arrests and conviction rate among communities of color.

The policies in HB 2169 were thoughtfully developed by the Criminal Justice Reform and Police Accountability Committee. This bill will make all of us safer by centering those who are most disproportionately harmed by our criminal justice system. We urge your YES vote on HB 2169. Thank you.

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