

THE OFFICE OF Q.E. KURANZ, ATTORNEY AT LAW, LLC
PORTLAND, OREGON

EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION • WAGE ACCOUNTABILITY • GENERAL CIVIL LITIGATION

February 23, 2021

To: Chair Power, Vice-Chari Wallan, and Members of the House Subcommittee on Civil Law
RE: House Bill 2205, The Just Enforcement Act

My name is Quinn Kuranz and I write to provide my strong support of HB 2205 to give workers the ability to enforce their workplace rights. My practice focuses on representing the workers that HB 2205 will affect. This bill will provide Oregonians with the power to ensure employers comply with existing Oregon employment law. Not only will this protect workers and workers' rights, but it will also help protect the Oregon businesses that already comply with Oregon employment laws. Oregon employers that take shortcuts around rest break or workplace safety requirements are able to undercut the prices of legitimate Oregon businesses that comply with the law. This lack of enforcement only incentivizes bad behavior and non-compliance. As a basic premise, workers, even highly skilled and educated workers come to the workplace in an inherently weak bargaining position. This allows unscrupulous employers to exploit workers' rights for financial gain, often without recourse.

I own and operate a small practice based in Portland, Oregon, but my firm takes cases all over the state. I represent high-wage earners, low-wage earners, and workers whose primary language is Spanish. In representing individuals against their employers or former employers, my office receives hundreds of calls each year from employees inquiring about their rights at work. Some of these individuals have actionable cases for discrimination or unpaid wages in which I can offer them representation. Some of these individuals have questions and need guidance about their employment situation in which case I can offer them consultation. And still some of these employees call because their employers are not following laws established to protect workers' health and safety. For these callers, I am left in the most uncomfortable position, telling them that it does appear that their employer is violating Oregon law, but that there is nothing that anyone can or will do to bring these employers into compliance. Often these employees come to me after they have gone to Oregon OSHA or BOLI wage and hour, to lodge a complaint. That complaint so often results in OSHA or BOLI mailing a form letter, explaining to the employer that they should follow the law. Employees are often shocked when they hear that OSHA or BOLI does not even call or investigate the allegations made and that nothing changes.

The Just Enforcement Act provides these workers with meaningful access to someone that will hear their allegations, investigate the situation, and pursue resolution on behalf of Oregon workers. The best part about this bill is that the Oregon legislature has an opportunity to provide Oregonians with this relief without further burdening Oregon taxpayers. From my perspective, the only reason to oppose this bill is if a person does not believe in the rights of all Oregonians to have a safe, healthy work environment in which each person can go to work to support their family.

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My sincerest hope would be that with the passage of this bill, my phones will suddenly stop ringing, meaning that Oregon employers are finally complying with their legal and moral responsibilities toward their workers. If that day were to ever come, I could happily turn my attentions to other injustices or other interests. But until Oregon employers comply with Oregon laws protecting workplace health and safety, there is work that must be done. The Just Enforcement Act will provide a powerful tool in carrying out that work. I strongly urge each member of the Oregon legislature to vote in favor of this bill and protect all Oregonians when they go to work.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

Quinn E. Kuranz

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