

February 23, 2021

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

The Oregon and Southern Idaho District Council of Laborers and the Laborers International Union of North America Local 737, strongly supports HB 2205 to give workers the power they need to enforce their rights in the workplace. LiUNA acknowledges that wage theft is a growing problem across a variety of sectors, including the construction industry. Wage theft, paired with the inability to enforce workers' protections drives down standards for all workers and creates an uneven landscape, positioning employers that follow the rules, at a disadvantage - due to having to compete with business that undercuts worker standards. Every worker deserves to be paid for a fair day's work and have their rights protected, no matter where they work or how much they make.

Over the past few decades, our state agencies charged with enforcing important labor protections have experienced a steady decline in funding and resources, while the size of Oregon's workforce has grown. Compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, wildfires, and an economic crisis those agencies have been overwhelmed by complaints to which, they do not have the capacity to respond.

Furthermore, a lack of outreach, accessible information and a fear of retaliation for speaking out has left Oregon's most vulnerable workers - those in agriculture, manufacturing, retail, and other low-wage industries - with little trust in the system that exists to protect them. In Oregon alone, wage theft claims submitted by workers between '06 and '19 amounted to more than \$50 million. Additionally, workers most acutely affected by wage theft are more likely to be womxn, immigrants, and BIPOC workers who work in low-wage, and labor-intensive industries - as well as rural communities with high need for immigrant workforce, including farm-labor, processing plants, meat packing plants, and frozen foods. BIPOC and immigrant communities across our state make up a greater portion of essential and frontline workers- and are also most impacted by the crises of COVID, wildfires and the economic downturn. These crises have laid bare the problems that already existed in our workplaces. Throughout the pandemic, our state agencies received record numbers of reports of workplace abuse and health and safety violations. During 2020, OR OSHA received complaints from 23 of the 35 largest workplace COVID outbreaks but were only able to investigate two. OR OSHA received ten times as many complaints as they do in a normal year.

The Just Enforcement Act would help ensure that workers feel safe in coming forward to seek remedies to important workplace issues and bolster vital enforcement capacity for state agencies. The Oregon and Southern Idaho District Council of Laborers and the Laborers International Union of North America Local 737 urge you to support HB 2205.

Signed,



Jeff Gritz,
Oregon & Southern Idaho District Council of Laborers



Zack Culver,
LiUNA Local 737