

Isabela Villarreal  
333 SE 2nd Ave.  
Portland, OR 97214  
isabela@nextuporegon.com



February 24, 2021

RE: House Bill 2205, The Just Enforcement Act

Chair Power, Vice-Chair Wallan, and Members of the House Subcommittee on Civil Law,

Next Up Action Fund strongly supports HB 2205 to give workers the power they need to enforce their rights at work. As members of the Fair Shot For All Coalition, we support this policy as part of the 2021 legislative agenda and our ongoing work to ensure racial, gender, and economic justice for residents in Oregon.

Our mission is to build political power with diverse young people to achieve a more just and equitable Oregon. 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.

Even when the state does enforce workplace laws, companies rarely face penalties. In claims brought to the state between 2006 and 2019, only 1% of Oregon businesses found guilty of wage theft ended up paying penalties imposed by the state.

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.

- While Latinx people make up 13% of the state's population, they have experienced more than 30% of COVID-19 infections.
- 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 was only able to investigate two. OR OSHA received ten times as many complaints as they do in a normal year.
- Immigrant workers disproportionately make up the workforce in industries that have seen the most widespread workplace outbreaks of COVID-19.

The Just Enforcement Act would provide workers with a voice in their workplace and create a revenue stream for state agencies to increase enforcement capacity. Providing an avenue for workers to partner with trusted community organizations to file suits on the state's behalf would allow workers who fear speaking out alone and risking their jobs to have the community at their backs while they do so. Next Up Action Fund urges you to support HB 2205.

Thank you,

Isabela Villarreal  
Policy and Communications Manager