



Senate Committee on Labor and Business
Testimony in Support of SB 1545 Future Ready Oregon
Andrea Meyer, Director of Government Relations
February 3, 2022

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With over 500,000 members in Oregon, AARP works to strengthen communities and advocate for what matters most to families, with a focus on health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment.

AARP Oregon is pleased to support SB 1545 with the proposed amendments to include “older Oregonians” in the listed “Priority population.” We support the equity lens brought to the current communities identified as Priority populations, including communities of color, women, low-income communities, rural and frontier communities, veterans, and participants in offender reentry programs. Older adult workers make up a portion of *each* of the priority populations but, as we describe below, face unique challenges and additional barriers in the workforce that are important to recognize when providing expanded workforce opportunities.

COVID is only the latest challenge to hit older adult workers. Older workers were the hardest hit in the 2020 recession. According to a University of Michigan longitudinal study, between 2010-2018, 55% of older workers 55 and older in the bottom half of the income distribution were forced to leave the workforce due to layoffs, plant closing, age discrimination, poor health and family concerns.

Financial Security

It's important to make sure that older workers remain in the workforce if they need to or choose to. Job loss during the preretirement years can undermine financial security now and into the future. Although unemployment rates have been falling, many job seekers ages 50 and older still face long-term unemployment at a higher rate than their younger counterparts. In September 2021, more than 1.3 million workers age 55 and older were unemployed, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Among job seekers in that age group, roughly half have been out of work for 27 weeks or more, which puts them in the category of long-term unemployed. As a result of long-term unemployment, many older workers might not reenter the workforce and retire earlier than planned.

Age Discrimination

The main challenge or barrier to employment that older workers face is age discrimination. Current data shows that 78% of older workers say they have seen or experienced age discrimination in the workplace. In 2020, 63% of older job seekers were asked—either on an

application or in a job interview—for age-related information, current salary, or salary history. And 90% of older jobseekers voluntarily submitted age-related information to prospective employers. Of women who have searched for a job since turning 40, 31% say that age discrimination has hurt them in getting a job. **Recognizing that this is a real issue here in Oregon, AARP will continue to advocate before this body to address our broken workplace age discrimination law.**

Misconception of Older Workers

Despite misconceptions around older workers, older Oregonians bring a lot of value to the workplace. An experienced worker brings expertise, maturity, and perspective. Employers have said that older workers are more reliable and accurate in their work, and often have better social skills. Yet negative stereotypes and outdated assumptions mean that older workers and job seekers are often treated unfairly.

Older workers, especially those in the Priority populations are interested in those skills that are in-demand, including technology, computer skills, professional skills, and licensing. Many older workers seeking reemployment need support services such as transportation or counseling/peer support during job-hunting or training. Whether its local workforce development boards, career pathway training, prior learning credit, workforce ready grants, industry consortia or benefit navigators, it is critical to address the barriers and needs of older Oregonians.

AARP Oregon is pleased to add its voice in support of Future Ready Oregon and with the proposed amendments, respectfully urges this Committee to pass SB 1545.