



TO: The Senate Committee on Labor and Business
FROM: Disability Rights Oregon (DRO)
DATE: February 3, 2022
RE: DRO's Testimony in Support of SB 1545 with Amendment

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

Disability Rights Oregon supports SB 1545, with proposed amendment to include persons with disabilities as a "priority population." Special thanks to Senator Kathleen Taylor for her support of that amendment.

SB 1545 with amendment will remediate the employment gap for persons with disabilities and improve opportunities for youth with disabilities.

Including persons with disabilities as a priority population is vital, given the disparities in employment rates between persons with disabilities and those without disabilities:

- In 2019, the percentage of Oregon workers with a disability who were employed as part of the workforce was 44%, compared to 78.3% of Oregon workers without a disability, an "employment gap" between persons with a disability and those without of 34.3%.¹
- In 2020, the total employment rate for persons with disabilities was 17.9% (down from 19.3% in 2019) compared to 61.8% (down from 66.3% in 2019) for persons without disabilities and the total unemployment rate for persons with disabilities was 12.6% (an increase of 5.3% from 2019) compared to 7.9% (a 4.4% increase from 2019) for persons without disabilities.²

SB 1545 will help to remediate that employment gap of 34.3%, and the disparity between unemployment rates for persons with disabilities and those without disabilities.

The proposed legislation benefits other populations, such as communities of color and women, which have intersectionality with disability. That intersectionality compounds the scope of discrimination and inequity that individuals in those communities experience. The bill should also include persons who are Native Americans as a "priority population," because they are most likely underserved by the Workforce system.

The focus on training and apprenticeship opportunities is important, given the existing disparities in education that impact future employment for persons with disabilities. Research has shown that youth with disabilities are less likely to graduate from high school, go to college or vocational training,³ engage in work experience in their final years of high school, and successfully become employed. In fact, in 2021, the percentage of youth aged 16-19 with disabilities that were participating in the workforce was 24.3%, whereas those of the same age

¹ 2020 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium (<https://disabilitycompendium.org>)

² US Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/disabl.pdf>)

³ *Id.*

without disabilities had a workforce participation rate of 36.8%. The unemployment rate for the same age range was 21.1% for those with disabilities and 11.4% for those without disabilities.⁴

Persons with a disability are less likely to have completed a bachelor's degree or higher than their peers with no disability. In Oregon, as of 2019, only 19% of people with a disability had a bachelor's degree or higher compared with 37% of those without a disability. Similarly, 14% of those with a disability did not graduate from high school versus 8% of those without a disability.⁵ Youth with disabilities connected with workforce development at a young age may also be less likely to apply for or utilize public benefits during adulthood.

Finally, the bill's emphasis on the construction, manufacturing, and health care industries is very pertinent to persons with disabilities, who are more likely to be employed in entry-level jobs in those industries. For example, in the construction industry, persons with disabilities are more likely than those without disabilities to be involved in grounds cleaning and maintenance operations. Similarly, persons with disabilities are less likely to be employed in management occupations across those industries. The gap of employment in management occupations between persons with disabilities and those without is greater in Oregon (3.6%) than in the nation overall (3%).⁶

SB 1545, with its proposed amendment to include persons with a disability as a "priority population," promises a richer and more equitable approach to workforce development. Disability Rights Oregon also suggests that additional amendments could be made to this important legislation. Those suggestions are attached to this written testimony. Thank you.

About Disability Rights Oregon

Disability Rights Oregon is a statewide nonprofit law firm that upholds the civil rights of 950,000 people with disabilities in Oregon to live, work, and engage in the community. Disability Rights Oregon works to transform systems, policies, and practices to give more people the opportunity to reach their full potential. Since 1977, the organization has served as Oregon's federally authorized and mandated Protection & Advocacy System. Disability Rights Oregon is committed to ensuring the civil rights of all people are protected and enforced.

For any concerns or questions contact Meghan Moyer at 503-432-5777.

⁴ <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/research-evaluation/statistics>

⁵ <https://www.qualityinfo.org/-/ready-willing-and-able>

⁶ 2020 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium (<https://disabilitycompendium.org>)

Disability Rights Oregon requests the following amendments to SB 1545, as introduced:

- In Section 1, subsection (8) the list of "priority populations" could be amended to include "**Persons with a disability.**"
- In Section 3, subsection (2)(b), the list of wraparound services could be amended to include services relating to persons with disabilities, such as: "To provide wraparound support services that are necessary to facilitate reengagement in the workforce, including, but not limited to, transportation, child care, **mental and physical restoration, personal care services, assistive technology for persons with a disability,** and rental assistance."
- In Section 5, subsection (a)(A), it could be amended to include "persons with disabilities" as a "particular community": "Nonprofit organization that are representative of a particular community, **such as persons with a disability,** or specific segments of a community and that are located within or in close proximity to the community served by the organization."
- In addition to or instead of the proposed amendment to Section 5, subsection (a)(A), a similar amendment could be made to Section 5, subsection (c), the definition of "cultural specific organization," to include "persons with a disability" within the concept of a "cultural community": "'Culturally specific organization' means an organization that serves a particular cultural community, **such as persons with a disability,** that is primarily staffed and led by members of that community and that demonstrates intimate knowledge of the lived experience of that community, including by not limited to: (A) The impact of racism, **able-ism, or other forms of** discrimination in the community; (B) Specific disparities in access to services and resources by the community; and (C) Community strengths, cultural practices, beliefs and traditions."
- In Section 5, subsection (4)(d), the list of things for which grant monies could be used could be amended to include "assistive technology for persons with a disability": "Procure up-to-date training equipment, technology, **including assistive technology for persons with a disability,** and other supplies to provide a modernized training experience for program participants."
- In Section 7, subsection (5)(d), the list of purposes for which grant monies can be used could be amended to include "assistive technology for persons with disabilities": "(d) To pay the costs of tools, **assistive technology for persons with a disability,** supplies, equipment and other training-related costs;"
- In Section 13, subsection (4)(e)(C), the list of potential organizational investments could be amended to include "assistive technology for persons with a disability": "(C) Purchasing equipment, technology, **including assistive technology for persons with a disability,** or other training-related supplies."
- In Section 15, subsection 2(b)(C), the purpose of the program could be amended to include development and implementation of "accessible" workforce education and training curricula: "Identify industry-specific workforce needs in this state, including the need for high-value credentials, to inform the development and implementation

of **accessible and** culturally and linguistically diverse workforce education and training curricula;"

- In Section 17, subsection (c)(C), the definition of a "Workforce benefits navigator" could be amended to include awareness of "disability-specific needs" from priority populations: "(C) Is aware of cultural and linguistic differences **and disability-specific needs** of individuals from priority populations."
- In Section 19, subsection (2), the joint report should also disaggregate by disability and disability type: "* * * shall prepare and submit a joint report that includes the information described in subsection (1) of this section, disaggregated by race, gender, **disability, disability type**, and geographic area, including any recommendations * * *."