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**Public Hearing before the House Business and Labor Committee**

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*Testimony in support of HB 2800*

Chair Holvey, Vice-chairs Elmer and Sosa, and members of the committee

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 2800, which would improve Oregon's protections against age discrimination in employment. This bill clarifies that age discrimination cannot be justified based on common proxies for age like costliness, length of service or retirement eligibility.

OLC's mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. Many of our clients have incomes at or below the federal poverty level, and work hard to provide the basic necessities for themselves and their family. Currently, many vulnerable low-income people continue to struggle to make ends meet. Oregon's housing crisis, the COVID pandemic and inflation have exacerbated the challenges for our low-income community, and an increasing number of our clients are forced to make terrible choices between paying for rent, food, medicine, or other necessities.

Stable employment is one protection against falling into crisis. Our seniors are especially vulnerable – nationally, an increasing number of seniors are aging into poverty and homelessness. People are living and working longer, and experienced workers bring expertise, maturity, and perspective. Yet negative stereotypes and outdated assumptions mean that older workers and job seekers are often treated unfairly.

Age discrimination also impacts women and people of color disproportionately. 62% of Oregonians ages 40+ have seen or experienced age discrimination in the workplace. Oregon Hispanic/Latino older workers reported at 63%. Women workers (64%) and Black workers (77%) report even higher percentage of having seen or experienced age discrimination

There is no place for age discrimination as a barrier to employment for older Oregonians who are capable of and seeking work. HB 2800 helps to remove barriers, to ensure that our state's older populations do not face discrimination in seeking or maintaining employment.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.