

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Labor and Business  
On SB 592**

**February 15, 2023**

**Jamie Pang  
Oregon Environmental Council**

Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Dear Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC), a nonpartisan, environmental nonprofit that works at the nexus of human health, climate change, and the environment, we would like to express our support for SB 592, which would strengthen inspections and trigger a comprehensive whole-workplace inspection if 3 or more violations occur within a year *or* an occupational death occurs.

**Oregon recently passed some of the most revolutionary worker protections in the nation.**

Oregon is currently looked upon as a climate leader and leader in the nation when it comes to worker's rights. OEC was heavily involved in the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) rulemakings to protect workers from heat and wildfire smoke exposures which finalized in June 2022. It therefore defies logic if Oregon's average penalty for a worker death from a violation of safety standards sits at just over \$1,000 – over 10 times less than the national OSHA penalty average.<sup>1</sup>

**Having strong worker protections and civil penalties is a form of climate change mitigation.**

Moreover, keeping workers safe and bad actors accountable, is a form of climate and health mitigation in the age of climate change. Because Oregon is predicted to double the number of hot days by 2040,<sup>2</sup> people working on the frontlines--including in smoke and extreme heat--are at a disproportionate risk of illness and death. Agricultural workers, fishers, forestry workers already account for 20% of heat-related deaths in the United States.<sup>3</sup> And

<sup>1</sup> [https://aflcio.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/2214\\_DOTJ\\_Final\\_42622\\_nobug.pdf](https://aflcio.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/2214_DOTJ_Final_42622_nobug.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> <https://oeonline.org/oha-report-climate-crisis-a-current-and-growing-threat-to-the-health-of-oregonians/>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.oregonlive.com/business/2021/06/farmworker-advocates-renew-call-for-extreme-heat-rules-after-oregon-laborer-dies.html>.

Construction workers also have 13 times higher heat-related fatality compared to workers in other industries.<sup>4</sup>

Yet after the deadly PNW heat dome of 2021, two of the businesses where workers died from heat stress, fought the OSHA fines.<sup>5</sup> We must do better. We therefore urge this Committee to move SB 592 forward as a commonsense way to ensure safer practices at workplaces and to prevent future tragedies.

Sincerely,

Jamie Pang  
Environmental Health Program Director  
Oregon Environmental Council  
[JamieP@OECONline.org](mailto:JamieP@OECONline.org)

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29389908/>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.oregonlive.com/business/2022/05/two-oregon-businesses-whose-workers-died-during-heat-wave-fight-state-fines.html>.