

SB 850 Written Testimony

My name is Eric Bongen, and I am an employee of MEI Group, a 3rd generation (non-Union) Heavy Civil Excavation company. I am also a proud board member for the NW Utility Contractors Association or NWUCA. MEI is an amazing company to work for supporting over 230 employees in the Portland Metro Area. Even though we have grown significantly over the past few years it is still a small family business that treats its employees as members of the family, with respect, care and pays some of the best competitive wages around.

A large portion of our work provides critical utilities for the Portland Metro area. We install water, sewer, storm sewer, and other utilities that are critically important for everyone. MEI has been providing this work for decades to this area, winning competitive bids let by public bodies. On average about 70% of our work on a yearly basis is public works projects. On these projects we have always paid prevailing wages with all of the required fringe benefits set forth by BOLI.

If SB 850 passes, MEI will no longer qualify to bid for public work. While we do have some private projects, there is not near enough work for private jobs heading into a recession. If we were no longer allowed to bid on public work, we would not be able to support the 230+ jobs that we do. I would not be able to support my family in the manner that I do now and many of my coworkers would likely end up losing their jobs as we would not have enough work to support them all.

Under existing law, union and open shops alike compete on a level playing field for these projects. MEI wins some bids and loses others. Our employees on public projects are paid the prevailing wage which is a reasonable means of allowing all bidders to compete fairly for these projects. Quite simply, the current system is working and has worked for decades. I simply do not understand how or why this current system that has worked for so long is going to be changed, with the result that many of us will lose our jobs. Limiting public works projects to only Union contractors tips the competitive balance completely in the favor of Union shops. Additionally in the Heavy Civil Excavation realm about 80+ percent of the contractors in the state are non-union companies. All of these companies would be left out and costs would end up rising more and more to the taxpayers as the union shops would not have near as much competition come bid time. Plain and simple the current system works. It promotes competition, fairness and equity across all contractors bidding for the work.

Please do not vote this bill out of committee. Do not repeal Oregon's successful Prevailing Wage Law and replace it with this untested, unfair, and unreasonable bill.

Thank You,

Eric Bongen

MEI Group, Inc.