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**To: Joint Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development**  
**From: Sybil Hebb, Oregon Law Center**  
**Date: March 8th, 2023**  
**Re: Support for SB 5515, Bureau of Labor and Industries Budget**

Co-Chairs Sollman and Evans, and members of the Subcommittee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 5515, and the Governor's Recommended Budget proposal that will support the Bureau of Labor and Industries.

While OLC supports the entirety of the BOLI proposed budget, we would like to focus specifically today on POP 130, to support the Civil Rights Division, and POP 131, to support the Fair Housing Enforcement Unit. These policy packages will help BOLI's Civil Rights Division in its implementation of its mission of ensuring that Oregonians can live and work free of discrimination and harassment.

The Oregon Law Center (OLC) is a state-wide non-profit law firm whose mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. Our mission is closely aligned with that of the Civil Rights Division of the BOLI. There are no two higher values for our clients than the ability to have safe and stable housing and employment that is free from harassment and discrimination.

We assist clients with issues related to housing, public benefits, custody and divorce matters, domestic violence and sexual assault, employment, elder abuse, and more. Low-income Oregonians, especially in these times of economic downturn, are more vulnerable than ever. The need for assistance is on the rise, and we are unable to serve all those who seek help, due to lack of resources. For this reason, the work of agencies such as BOLI is extremely important to our vulnerable clients.

POP 131 would support the Fair Housing Enforcement Unit. BOLI's Fair Housing Unit has a big role to play in ensuring that both housing providers and renters know their rights and obligations. Oregon's housing laws protect the right to choose and live in a home without being treated differently because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or other protected classes. But, in times of great crisis such as these, where housing is increasingly unaffordable for all Oregonians in every corner of the state, and rent prices have increased far more quickly than wages, renters are increasingly vulnerable in the marketplace. The risk and impact of discrimination is greater in unbalanced markets, increasing the importance of access to enforcement.

Our office has frequently heard from clients who have found assistance through BOLI's fair housing enforcement unit, where they have been able to access investigation of the facts and a determination of substantial finding of discrimination. Oregon, like many states across the country, has a long history of redlining, denied access to credit, and other systemic barriers to housing equity. Our state's Fair Housing Act is an important stance against systemic housing discrimination that is nothing more than theory without access to enforcement to ensure implementation, and accountability for violation.



**Oregon  
Law Center**  
WORKING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE JUSTICE FOR LOW INCOME OREGONIANS

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**BOLI is a critical presence in this state's employment and housing community.**

In these times, low-income individuals are particularly vulnerable when trying to address job or housing injustices. A single parent struggling to pay rent, child care, and household expenses may be simply unable to take the risk of leaving a job that is not paying wages for all hours worked. Without some access to enforcement of wage claims, that parent would have no recourse. Another family seeking safe housing may be denied because they have children. The impact of such a violation of our housing civil rights laws would be immense on a family in this market.

When an employee is not paid for his or her work, that matter is of critical importance for that individual and his or her family. When a family cannot find housing because of discrimination, that is a barrier to safety and stability for that family. In many ways, the agency is the only access to justice for low income Oregonians seeking fair and impartial resolution of disputes with employers or with landlords on civil rights issues. Without a forum for resolution of these important issues, the lives of many individuals would be significantly harmed.

In addition to resolution of issues, the agency also provides basic information and access to resources for individuals as well as training, technical assistance, and materials for employers, employees, and landlords and tenants.

Our experience has shown that agency staff handle cases professionally and with expertise and respect for all parties, and that investigators do a thorough job of looking into the facts and speaking with all sides to make determinations. Adequate staffing is necessary for the agency to continue this work that is so important for vulnerable Oregonians.

Thank you for your consideration, and do not hesitate to contact me should you have questions.

Sincerely,

Sybil Hebb  
Oregon Law Center