



A STRONG VOICE FOR OREGON'S WORKERS

TO: Co- Chairs Woods and Gomberg
Members of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development
FR: Graham Trainor, Oregon AFL-CIO President
RE: SB 5515 Support, BOLI Budget

March 8, 2023

The Oregon AFL-CIO represents 300,000 workers across Oregon and is a voice for all workers in the legislative process. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 5515, the Bureau of Labor and Industries's budget.

We know that all the good laws that the Oregon legislature has passed over the years – from civil rights, sick and medical leave, prevailing wage, apprenticeships, pay equity and so many more – are truly only as good as they are able to be enforced. We are excited about the leadership, investments and creative enforcement strategies that the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) continues to take on and we know that additional investments are critical to effectively and meaningfully ensure that Oregon continues to be a leader in the nation when it comes to worker protections. SB 5515 makes progress to address some of these capacity challenges.

We know that wage claims have increased by 73% in the last year with a backlog of more than 1000 civil rights cases. SB 5515 helps address this by adding 2 investigators and a support staff to make sure that workers don't have to wait as long as they currently do to resolve time-sensitive claims. This more expedient recovery of unpaid earned wages means that workers won't have to skip paying their rent or putting food on the table for their family.

SB 5515 also allocates funds for two new positions for the civil rights division to address discrimination, retaliation, workplace safety, workers' compensation and Oregon Family Leave Act (OFLA) violations. With this additional capacity, workers throughout the state will be well served knowing that if they face discrimination or harassment on the job that BOLI will have the resources to investigate and remedy the situation.

We also applaud the addition of the Administrative Law Officer to provide compliance advice and additional public records support in SB 5515 to help expedite public records timelines.

As Oregon's economy continues to grow, the need for a properly funded Bureau of Labor and Industries is vital to ensure that workers and employers know their rights and responsibilities. SB 5515 makes significant progress to appropriately resource this critical department. However, we will note that more can be done, particularly in making sure employers actually pay their penalties, meaningful and ongoing engagement with historically and currently marginalized workers, increased resources for those who do not speak English, and more avenues and remedies for those workers who may fear retaliation for filing a complaint with a state agency.

Resourcing the Bureau of Labor and Industries to swiftly, comprehensively and meaningfully enforce our state labor laws is critical to workers, employers and our economy as a whole. We respectfully request the committee support SB 5515 to ensure that the agency's budget can continue to catch up with the number of Oregonians it serves.