



Oregon Just Transition Alliance

March 14, 2023

To: Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Bonham, and members of the Senate Committee On Labor and Business,

Re: Senate Bill 907

Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Bonham, members of the Committee,

My name is Joel Iboa, I live in Eugene, and I am the Executive Director of the Oregon Just Transition Alliance, a movement of communities facing environmental racism, climate change, and economic exploitation.

We believe that no matter where we live or work, how much money we make, or our background, every Oregonian worker deserves to exercise their right to reasonably refuse work that can cause them death, serious impairment, or serious injury. Supporting SB 907 would allow workers to feel safer at their jobs without risk of retaliation.

While state rules allow workers to refuse unsafe work in theory, right now it is very difficult to exercise this right, and doing so often results in retaliation. SB 907 does not create a new right, nor does it give an unfettered right for workers to refuse to work. It takes an existing right that is hidden in an administrative rule and clarifies it in the statute.

Oregon workers are increasingly at risk of illness and death on the job due to climate hazards. Over the last three years, we have faced a worldwide pandemic, wildfires unlike anything we've seen before, and an unprecedented heat wave that took the lives of more than 100 people, including Oregon farmworker Sebastian Francisco Perez. In addition, workers are exposed to other dangerous conditions when they work with heavy machinery, toxins, and other hazards. Lower-income, Latinx, and Black workers remain at greater risk of dying on the job. Each one of these deaths can be prevented.

Data shows that workplace hazards kill approximately 125,000 workers each year in the U.S.—4,764 from traumatic injuries and another 120,000 from occupational diseases. This averages out to 340 workers' deaths each day from hazardous working conditions. Increasing extreme weather events are only exacerbating these problems for many workers.

Outdoor workers, for example, account for 20% of heat-related deaths. Here in Oregon, people working on the frontlines, including in smoke and extreme heat, are at a high risk of illness and death. For example, there were at least 254 complaints submitted to OSHA during the 2020 summer heat waves and at least 3 deaths during the three-day period of the heat dome.

SB 907 would allow workers to reasonably refuse to do work that can cause them death, serious impairment, or serious injuries, such as extreme heat or unsafe equipment. In response, an employer can either fix the dangerous condition or move workers to other jobs that are not hazardous. Additionally, it would give workers the right to use PTO time to leave or refuse to report to a worksite due to extreme natural disasters, active evacuations, and acts of criminal violence such as mass shootings.

We live in an economy that is extractive and exploitative. Under a just transition, we believe that every person has the right to self-determination where every individual has rights. These rights are inherent and cannot be taken away. Individuals have the right to the resources required to lead a productive, dignified, equitable, and sustainable life. The fundamental right to political, economic, cultural, and environmental self-determination for all people leads to less extractive systems. Giving the workers the option to protect themselves in a dangerous workplace situation allows for this self-determination that all people deserve.

Please vote 'Yes' on SB 907.

Sincerely,

Joel Iboa
Oregon Just Transition Alliance
Executive Director