

Dear Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Bonham, members of the Committee, for the record, my name is the Rev. Connie Yost, President of Farm Worker Ministry Northwest, and I live in Portland, Oregon.

I support SB 907 because I have worked with Oregonians who have suffered serious, life-altering injuries on the job in working conditions that never should have been allowed to occur. As President of Farm Worker Ministry Northwest I have provided pastoral presence and support for families, workers and community members who are traumatized and grief-stricken when a worker dies on the job, or is seriously injured.

Workplace hazards kill approximately [125,000 workers each year](#)—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. And [Oregon](#) already has a higher fatality rate than neighboring states- our 2021 workplace fatality rate was 3.3 worker deaths per 100,000 workers, compared to California's 2.8 and Washington State's 2.1. And these numbers don't even account for non-fatal serious injuries. For example, during Oregon's deadly 2020 heat dome, there were at least [254 workplace complaints](#) submitted to OSHA for dangerous heat exposure and at least 3 deaths.

This problem is exacerbated by rapidly accelerating climate change, resulting in devastating wildfires, ice storms, and extreme heat. A whopping [5-10 million workers](#) are exposed to outdoor heat exposures beyond safe levels each year, and outdoor workers account for [20% of heat-related deaths](#). As a result, Oregon workers are increasingly at risk of illness and death on the job due to climate hazards. In addition, workers are exposed to other dangerous conditions when they work with heavy machinery, toxins and other hazards. Lower-income, and Latinx and Black workers remain at greater risk of dying on the job than all workers. Each one of these deaths can be prevented.

An existing rule, clarified:

While [state](#) rule already allows workers to refuse unsafe work, this right is very difficult to exercise, and often results in retaliation. The Oregon legislature must guarantee the “right to safe work” by making this *existing* right easier to exercise.

SB 907 would:

- Allow workers to reasonably refuse to do work that can cause them death, serious impairment or serious injury— such as unsafe equipment. It does *not* give workers an unfettered right to skip work.
- Give workers the right to leave or refuse to report to a worksite due to extreme natural disasters, active evacuations, and acts of criminal violence and terrorism such as mass shootings.
- Allow employers the opportunity to remove or fix the hazardous conditions or reassign a worker to a different job, in which case the worker would not have a right to refuse.
- Allow sick time, PTO, or vacation time to be used to protect a worker's pay in situations where it is too dangerous to work.
- Protect workers from retaliation under Oregon's already-established rebuttable presumption if they exercise this right in good faith and act as a reasonable person would.

Oregon workers need to be safe on the job. These small changes could save a life. If a worker reasonably believes a job assignment can seriously injure or kill them, they should be able to say no. **I urge your support and vote yes on SB 907.**

Thank you,

Rev. Connie Yost, President

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