

Chair Holvey, Vice Chairs, and members of the committee,

My name is Zack Culver. I am the Business Manager and Secretary-Treasurer of LIUNA Local 737, and I live in Rep. Elmer's district in rural Yamhill County. Our union represents about 3,000 members who primarily work as construction craft Laborers. Our members live and work across the entire state.

As you've heard already, SB 594 closes a loophole in existing prevailing wage coverage. I want to first explain why this is good for workers. Our members work in industries like asbestos abatement, hazardous waste removal, and soil remediation. These industries are partially excluded from existing prevailing wage coverage. Despite the fact that these jobs require highly skilled labor and are dangerous, often requiring exposure to toxic substances, workers can be excluded from prevailing wages. This isn't right.

Workers who gain the required certifications to work in these industries are subjected to irregular pay rates. Depending on the nature of the job, you might get prevailing wage on your current job, but not on your next job, even if you work primarily on public projects doing the same work. This causes a lack of predictability for workers, and it is frustrating for them and their families.

Dozens and dozens of our members signed letters of support for this bill because they see the value in it, which you can see on OLIS.

This change will also be good for contractors, both union and non-union. Because of the irregularity of good paying work, workers are disincentivized from staying in this industry. Every spring, for example, both union and non-union contractors scramble to find and train workers to perform asbestos abatement work, which tends to be seasonal and heavily impacted by work on schools during the coming summer months. SB 594 will help us incentivize workers to stay in this industry by maintaining good wages, and will provide more stable projects for contractors to keep their workers employed over time. Closing this prevailing wage loophole will also make it easier for businesses to provide year-round work for their most skilled employees, which will help businesses maintain their workforces, especially in the rural areas of our state.

We worked with signatory contractors who submitted letters of support for this legislation because they see the value in it. You can read their letters on OLIS.

Finally, this change will benefit public owners by maintaining a workforce that is skilled and trained, which will ultimately result in cost savings for public owners on work in this industry. This will ensure there are contractors available to bid work, and complete jobs on time and on budget.

Ultimately, this loophole needs to be closed. We have a longstanding position in Oregon that public works projects should provide workers with prevailing wages. Demolition and hazardous waste cleanup are essential aspects of construction and public works. I urge you to support the workers and contractors in this industry by supporting this bill and closing this loophole.

