

Submitter: Leonardo Palacio

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Business and Labor

Measure: SB907

Chair Holvey, Vice-Chairs Elmer and Sosa, and members of the Committee, for the record, my name is Leonardo Ruiz Palacio. I'm a workers advocate on behalf of the organization Pineros Y Campesinos Unidos Del Noroeste (PCUN) , and I live in Salem, Oregon. I support SB 907A 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. I have heard and seen too many examples of workers being put into dangerous positions due to their jobs that could, and have, put them in severe danger. A close friend of mine once had to deal with barrels of deadly and harsh chemicals all only with gloves and a mask, nothing to cover his bare skin. Another close friend of mine's father has also lost his ability to walk due to his inability to refuse working on a high platform in the dead of night which resulted in him falling off said platform and forever living with the results. 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. This is no theoretical problem. 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 Summer heat waves in 2020 and at least 3 deaths during the 3 day period of the heat-dome.

SB 907A WOULD:

Clarify that an employee has a protected right to refuse dangerous work that could result in a serious injury or death, as long as there is no reasonable alternative and the employee acts in good faith. This protection would be added to ORS 654.062, the anti-retaliation section of the Oregon Safe Employment Act.

Direct Oregon OSHA to adopt rules in accordance with the federal Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970.

SB 907A 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 statute. It would use Oregon's already-established rebuttable presumption to protect workers who exercise this right from retaliation. Please vote

'Yes' on SB 907A. Workers are being killed in Oregon at higher rates than neighboring states. We need to give workers the option to protect themselves in dangerous workplace situations. Thank you for your time.