

February 10, 2025

Dear House Committee on Labor and Workforce Standards,

My name is Paige Barton, and I'm a resident of Salem. While this testimony is submitted as an individual representing my own experience, I additionally serve as the Chair of the Marion County Democratic Party.

For the last five years, I have worked for labor organizations. I'm in the process of changing my career. I'm writing in favor of House Bill 2957, which seeks to prohibit employer actions that limit the statute of limitations for complaints defined under ORS 659A.820. Thank you for reading my explanation of why below.

I was a labor representative for Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA), AFT Local 6732, until October of 2024.

At OSEA, I experienced near-constant bullying from my supervisor. After unsuccessful attempts to manage the situation alone, I attempted to raise attention to the bullying I experienced through an internal complaint process.

Despite attending several meetings with OSEA members, where school districts provided skilled investigators to evaluate complaints like mine, OSEA opted to have their own Executive Director investigate. OSEA's Executive Director Susan Miller is not an attorney or member of the Oregon State Bar, yet she replied to my complaint to say I had not described illegal harassment.

The behavior I endured from my supervisor dramatically impacted me. I have had diagnoses of mental health conditions since I was a teenager. I've worked hard to live with these conditions, and they've been historically well-controlled as I've had success in many areas of my life.

While employed at OSEA, I experienced a rapid deterioration of previously well-managed conditions. I was evaluated at a Salem medical center for a mental health crisis last August.

Despite the stigma of mental health conditions within employment settings, it became clear to me that I had to disclose a qualified disability impacting my ability to fully perform my work. I had experience in labor work and I hoped to be successful at my job.

I was terminated from OSEA just weeks after requesting accommodation, in writing with medical certification. I did not experience effective accommodation, nor a reasonably quick effort to conduct an interactive meeting.

OSEA management retaliated against me for the complaint by presenting performance issues for the first time after I provided medical documentation of my conditions and requested accommodations.

Part of the alleged performance issue was being unresponsive during a period of protected medical absence.

I currently have a complaint before the Bureau of Labor and Industries that alleges disability discrimination, under ORS 659A.820. It also alleges retaliation for use of sick leave, due to the allegation that I had performance issues by not being adequately responsive to OSEA while I was off to deal with a serious medical event.

Oregon employers who currently benefit from agreements that would interfere with statutory timelines on complaints like these include labor organizations like OSEA.

Many of OSEA's members work with students with disabilities, yet I'm dismayed at how I was treated with retaliation and hostility as an OSEA employee with a disability. I'm not the only one.

All of OSEA's members have just cause protections from Day One of employment, thanks to your work to pass ORS 334.231. However, OSEA employees do not enjoy the same right.

Employees of labor organizations would benefit from passage of HB 2957. Labor organizations have significant interest in agreements like these, to hide from their members the unimaginable misdeeds towards their staff. The Bureau of Labor and Industries is **one of the only ways** union staff have to hold bad employers like OSEA accountable.

Thank you for reading.

Sincerely,

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