

Submitter: Jess O'Donnell  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2957

Testimony in Support of HB 2957

Dear Honorable Committee Members,

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 2957, which aims to extend employees' time to file a complaint against their workplace after submitting a request to the Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI). As someone who has personally experienced the devastating consequences of a toxic, hostile, and unsafe work environment in which I experienced retaliation by my employer, I understand the importance of having a fair and accessible process for seeking justice.

In my own experience, I faced retaliation for speaking out against discriminatory practices in the workplace. The emotional toll was immense, and the lack of support from my employer left me feeling isolated and vulnerable. The professional toll was greater. Despite my efforts to report the incidents, I encountered numerous barriers that prevented me from getting the help I needed. This experience has driven my passion for advocating for workers' rights and ensuring that no one else has to go through what I did.

Unfortunately, the current system is inadequately addressing the needs of Oregon's employees. BOLI is facing a significant backlog of cases, with many complaints taking months or even years to be resolved. Currently BOLI's website clearly states the limitations the department has. This delay can have severe consequences for employees who are already struggling to cope with the trauma of workplace discrimination. The backlog not only prolongs the suffering of affected employees but also undermines the effectiveness of the complaint process.

The current 30-day window for filing complaints exacerbates this issue. Employees may be forced to wait months for BOLI to review their initial request, only to have a short timeframe to gather evidence and submit their formal complaint. This rushed process can lead to incomplete or inaccurate submissions, further delaying resolution and potentially resulting in denied claims.

HB 2957 proposes to extend this timeframe to 180 days, providing employees with a more reasonable opportunity to prepare and submit their complaints. This extension is essential for several reasons:

1. Fairness and Justice: By giving employees more time to file complaints, we ensure that they have a fair chance to seek justice and hold their employers accountable for any wrongdoing.
2. Reducing Barriers: The current 30-day window can be a significant barrier for employees who may not have the resources or support to navigate the complaint process quickly. Extending the timeframe helps level the playing field.
3. Encouraging Reporting: A longer timeframe will encourage more employees to report incidents of discrimination and harassment, which is essential for creating a safer and more inclusive work environment.

Furthermore, extending the timeframe will help alleviate some of the pressure on BOLI's resources. Allowing employees more time to gather evidence and submit their complaints can reduce the likelihood of incomplete or inaccurate submissions, ultimately streamlining the process and reducing the backlog.

I urge you to support HB 2957, as it addresses a critical gap in our current system and takes a crucial step towards creating a fairer and more just workplace for all Oregonians. By extending the time for filing complaints, we can ensure that employees have a reasonable opportunity to seek justice and hold their employers accountable.

Thank you for considering my testimony. I am confident that this legislation will have a positive impact on the lives of many Oregonians and look forward to seeing it move forward.

Sincerely,

Jess O'Donnell (she/her)