

# RABBI FORA

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February 12, 2025

House Committee on Labor and Workplace Standards

Re: HB 2957

Dear Committee Members,

Buenas Tardes miembros del comité y vice presidenta Muñoz. Gracias por el tiempo y oportunidad hablar con ustedes hoy.

My name is Rabbi Forest Alexander, many of you know me by Fora. I'm a non-binary organizer and activist. I moved to Oregon in 2020 from Texas because I wanted to live somewhere that recognized my humanity. This month, the federal government decided I do not exist. Regardless of that ruling, here I sit. Those of you in this room who know me know I am an active member of my community, a passionate advocate for positive change, and undyingly proud of my queerness.

I'm here today to speak in favor of these reforms to BOLI. I've had the unfortunate experience of filing multiple complaints since living here. I'd like to narrow in on one. I decided to quit a job due to constant and repeated discriminatory language and behavior. However, I am not a person of means. I needed to file for unemployment to pay rent until my next job came along. For those unaware, when one leaves a job, they must prove they had a reasonable reason to quit in order to receive funds. My "reasonable reason" was discrimination but due to these very issues with BOLI, my claim stalled. This left me behind on my bills. The only reason I did not end up homeless was the grace of community who allowed me some flexibility. However, I did have to change residences.

This is a common theme for queer, trans, and non-binary people. Even when we do access the remedies available to us, those remedies have hidden pitfalls the average person is unable to avoid. By matching the statue of expectations to other claims, you would ensure folks are able to equitably participate in the process; it puts the onus back on the government to support *us* rather than us trying to support ourselves.

Those of you here who know me likely do from my canvassing efforts. You've seen me show up in your communities and speak with your constituents. And I need to remind you all, elections are cyclical. When I leave campaign jobs, I'm left to the mercy of market forces. I say that because if you want organizers to canvass, we need to stay sheltered between elections.

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Due process is more than an abstract ideal. It has real world ramifications that mean bills go unpaid, bellies go empty, and communities disenfranchised.

It was mentioned during oral testimony that we should consider the difficulties this raises for employers. I would like to remind the committee, people only seek out BOLI when employers have behaved in a way the employee *believes* to be illegal. Therefore, if employers don't wish to be held accountable they can simply not commit crimes.

Additionally, the argument was made (I'm paraphrasing) "People **choose** to use BOLI **knowing** it effects their statute of limitations." This is patently false based on my own experience using the system and my experience as clergy working with marginalized groups. People choose to use BOLI because it is an accessible option. **Therefore**, the people most likely to use the service are the same ones unable to **access** other options.

Finally, the argument was made that this is "costly" for the taxpayer. Not only is the cost of fact finding a negligible line item in our very large budget, it is unconstitutional to say folks shouldn't receive legal representation and assistance because it's "expensive". The Sixth Amendment of the United States Constitution affords everyone in our country the right to the legal process regardless of ability to pay.

As the federal government continues it's shock and awe doctrine focused partially on my community, now is the time to solidify these reforms. There will very soon come a time when there are simply too many fires to put out for administrative remedies like these to get the attention they need.

I sincerely appreciate the opportunity and privilege to speak with you all.

Thank you for your time.

-Rabbi Fora