



To: Joint Committee on Transportation and Economic Development

From: Jessica Hendrickson

Date: February 25, 2025

RE: 2025-2027 BOLI Budget

Dear Co-chair Woods, Co-chair Gomberg, and members of the committee,

My name is Jessica Hendrickson, I am a member of SEIU Local 503 and Sublocal 839. I work at the Bureau of Labor and Industries as a Compliance Specialist and am writing today to express my emphatic support for the Governor's Recommended 2025-2027 Budget. I am also additionally asking that you fully fund the agency request budget to retain trained staff and reduce caseloads by hiring more workers. The additional funding in the full agency request budget is essential to the agency's staff retention and recruitment strategy, enabling BOLI to obtain and retain the talent necessary to provide the essential services it provides to workers.

Currently, Oregon ranks among the top three states in the nation for wage policies, worker protections, and workers' rights to organize. However, as I am sure you are aware, BOLI's capacity to help both workers and employers alike is suffering due to a long-term lack of investment. I urge you to support the local workers and businesses that keep Oregon's economy moving forward by supporting the workers doing this work.

In 2006 I moved to Oregon to become part of a state that I understood to be beautiful, creative, and most importantly, kind. In fact, I remember after moving here, being stunned by the regular benevolence of Oregon's citizenry as they waived me in to merge into traffic, or discussed ways they could help one another and others, over coffee.

In 2017, I graduated from the pre-apprenticeship training program offered by Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc. and joined the construction industry workforce. On this career path I made friends, achieved journeyman status, and learned a great many useful things in addition to my trade such as the temperaments and topographical features found across our extraordinary state.

Unfortunately, I also witnessed and experienced firsthand much of what BOLI protects workers against, such as harassment and discrimination. I never sought the assistance of BOLI with the adversity I faced as I imagined it would make things worse for me, rather than better. However, when I no longer felt safe, and decided to leave the trades, I was inspired by my experience to seek work at the bureau and do for others what I did not manage to do for myself.

I hear so many of my colleagues say that they took a pay cut to do “the good work,” and I proudly, but also begrudgingly, count myself among them. Intent aside, I considered leaving BOLI in the months following my hire due to experiences relating to the lack of time and resources to train, retain, and support staff; These resources that with funding would otherwise allow staff to feel like they are valued and can make a substantive difference in the lives of the folks we are trying to help. I remember joking with someone that starting in my current position was a bit like being given, and to read out of, a huge manual on how to put a car together for two weeks, and then being told that there are already a line of cars waiting to be put together and fixed. It would be remiss of me not to add that the “manual” keeps changing as laws and procedures are updated!

Indeed, I have also heard how many people before me chose to leave for these reasons; People with a knowledge of labor laws, and their successful application, that can only be acquired through years of work in this field, with this agency. I genuinely believe that everyone at this agency is doing their very best, and that they are all exceptional people who remind me of my initially enchanting experiences upon moving here. It is for these same reasons that workers who seek help from BOLI are often not able to receive timely responses from the workers at BOLI.

It is also for these reasons that there is now even a chance that it may be necessary for their claim to be triaged out of our system completely so that we are able to attend to the most egregiously affected workers.

It is hard to explain how much I abhor explaining that yes, BOLI’s job is to enforce labor laws, and yes, your employer clearly broke the law based on what you are telling me, but no, if you file a claim we are unable to help you at this time, or if we can it will take at least six months for any action on your claim to be taken. It doesn’t feel right. It doesn’t sound right. And as they say, if it quacks like a duck... but what choice do we have?

With the world becoming a tougher and more complex place to navigate every day, we must work together to support one another so that we can all move forward together. We all work; we are all affected. I work full-time and know that even though I am currently helping approximately 115 affected workers in my caseload, it is still not enough. So, I am

here today, on my own time, in an attempt to help make a difference in the lives of working Oregonians beyond the 115 currently in my caseload. BOLI provides a lifeline for many workers and, and for many, perhaps their only chance at justice. It also provides employers with invaluable resources and education opportunities to aid them in understanding labor laws so that they can create legally viable environments where workers and employers can work and grow together in support of Oregon's financial stability and desirability as a destination.

In closing, I again would ask the Chairs, Vice-Chairs and members of the committee to endorse the 2025-2027 Governor's Recommended Budget with an additional \$2.5 million because we, BOLI, Oregon, cannot continue to provide quality services without investments from the legislature. With additional staffing, BOLI staff can be provided more job training and related resources so that they can continue to help develop and establish apprenticeships that provide employment opportunities, investigate claims, offer employer training, and ultimately support working Oregonian families.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jessica Hendrickson