



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

I'm Seth Johnstone, and I'm asking for your support to fully fund the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industry (BOLI) and vote YES to advance House Bill 5015 on behalf of Basic Rights Oregon (BRO). As the state's longest-serving LGBTQ+ advocacy organization, I urge you to fund the agency, especially the civil rights division, to support our state's workers and respond to potential violations in a timely and effective manner.

Basic Rights Oregon is a leader when it comes to advocating for civil rights protections for employees in our state laws. In 2007, the Legislature passed the Oregon Equality Act, which extended employment discrimination protections to include sexual orientation and gender identity. Oregon was one of the first states in the nation to offer anti-discrimination protections to transgender workers—one of many policies that makes our state one of the best for LGBTQ+ folks in the country.

But while our state laws convey equality, in mechanism and practice the story is currently very different. As you are all aware, BOLI does not currently have the funding, technology or staff power to process and investigate employment discrimination cases in a timely fashion. According to a recent BOLI State of the Worker report, the bureau expected to drop over 400 civil rights violation claim cases due to lack of capacity in 2024 alone and wait times are too long.

This is untenable for Oregonians—including our LGBTQ+ workforce, who are disproportionately represented in BOLI claims. As the Transgender Justice Program Manager at Basic Rights Oregon, I can tell you firsthand that we receive calls from LGBTQ+ people who believe they have been illegally fired or discriminated against at work on a regular basis. They file a BOLI complaint expecting communication or investigation and recourse, but then wait months to hear anything back—in the meantime they are not sure how to pay rent or what to do next so they call us. It's disheartening to see this happening in Oregon, where we pride ourselves on being an affirming and welcoming state for all.

Our state can't establish legal protections to our LGBTQ+ residents and other vulnerable groups, if those protections are not actually accessible at the time they are most needed. If we want to live up to the purpose of our laws and our rhetoric, then we need to dedicate time, funding and staffers to carrying those actions out.

Thank you for considering our testimony. I encourage a strong YES vote on HB 5015.