



To: Joint Committee on Transportation and Economic Development

From: Phil Edwards, SEIU 503

Date: February 24, 2025

RE: BOLI Budget HB 5015

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

My name is Phil Edwards, I am a member of the SEIU Local 503. I work at the Bureau of Labor and Industries as a Compliance Specialist II.

I am writing in support of the 2025-2027 BOLI Agency Request Budget reflected in the Governor's Recommended Budget to protect workers' rights and promote employment in Oregon. This investment is essential to the agency's staff retention strategy and recruiting talent to support essential services like wage theft claims.

Over the years, Oregon has become a model for the nation for workers' protections and opportunities. Oregon currently ranks among the top three states for wage policies, worker protections and right to organize. Let's keep it that way by investing in BOLI.

I began my career with BOLI as a Compliance Specialist II in early 2022. My job today entails reviewing wage claims, following up on leads regarding information, attempting to obtain information from employers and claimants, weighing evidence provided to determine if it is sufficient to progress claims, and making determinations on evidence provided to resolve wage claims submitted to our agency. My job is rewarding when I am able to provide a resolution to both the claimant and employer. I am proud to say that our team, as small as it is, has helped hundreds of Oregonians and hope to help many more.

BOLI provides a lifeline for many workers and, perhaps, their only chance at justice. With additional staffing, BOLI staff can continue to provide job training, develop apprenticeships or employment opportunities, investigate claims, or quickly support a family bringing new life into the world.

In my experience as a Compliance Specialist II, in the unit that investigates wage claims filed with the Wage and Hour Division, it is my opinion that we are incredibly understaffed, under-equipped, and overwhelmed with the workload to employee balance. The backlog of cases increases at a rate our staff are unable to keep up with. The unit is unable to progress wage claims efficiently due to equipment and access to vital software that can be used to progress claims to a resolution. Our unit is unable to close enough cases at its present capacity to keep up with the current volume of cases being submitted on a monthly basis. The technology used currently may have connectivity issues slowing progress, limited access rights allowing only one user or limited access to portions of the software required to progress claims, and geographic restrictions only allowing access from an office hardwired setting.

Restrictions on access and removing the roadblocks that prevent use of software from any work site hinder the ability of investigative staff to progress claims at a faster pace. The lack of staff and managerial positions, who aid in research and decision-making, limit the ability of our agency to move expeditiously through the backlog of claims. Better access and less restrictions on vital software would allow our investigative staff to research and provide better and faster decisions. More investigative staff and managerial positions would allow for our agency to make an effective stand in an effort to address the growing backlog of claims submitted to our office.

The public depends on our agency and its staff to be there when they have limited or no other options, if we are not funded it is likely that our agency will have to make changes to the types of claims we can accept. I became a public servant to help my fellow Oregonians. I want to come to work and help as many people as I am able, currently, limited resources and very low staffing, is making helping everyone that files very difficult. Please help our agency help the good people of Oregon.

As a state worker, I care deeply about my public service to Oregon and all Oregonians who rely on our services. In closing, I ask the Chairs, Vice-Chairs and members of the committee to fully fund the agency request budget. If funded, I believe that our agency would have the opportunity to really make an impact on claims for the claimants and employers that we encounter.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Phil Edwards