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February 27th, 2025

Joint Committee on Transportation and Economic Development
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

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

On behalf of the Professional and Technical Employees, Local 17 (PROTEC17), I write today in support of fully funding the Bureau of Labor and Industries. PROTEC17 represents approximately 10,000 public sector employees across the Pacific Northwest, including over 1,000 engineers, planners, information technology specialists, and technicians employed by the City of Portland.

Our members provide vital public services to the people of the City of Portland, including engineering services for critical transportation, water, and sewer infrastructure, permitting services for residential and commercial development, environmental protection enforcement, and emergency services through Portland Street Response. However, without a strong, fully funded agency to enforce labor protections, these workers' rights and the services they provide are at risk.

PROTEC17 has seen firsthand how disinvestment in BOLI has created an enforcement crisis. BOLI has fewer staff now than it did in the 1980s, despite significant growth in Oregon's workforce. This staffing shortage has led to unacceptable delays in investigating claims and allows wage theft, and discriminatory practices to continue unchecked.

At the same time, uncertainty at the federal level underscores the urgency for Oregon to prioritize strong state enforcement of worker protections.

When BOLI is stretched too thin, the message is clear: worker's rights are not a priority, and bad actors can exploit their workers without consequence. We cannot allow this to continue. Oregon's workers deserve an enforcement agency that is strong enough to ensure that the laws passed by the Legislature meant to protect them are effectively enforced.

Oregon has some of the strongest worker protection laws in the country, but without BOLI's enforcement, these laws are nothing more than words on paper. BOLI needs full funding to give these protections real power, and ensure no worker is left waiting months for their rights to be enforced.

Workers deserve better. Oregon deserves better. PROTEC17 members strongly urge you to fully fund BOLI and give the agency the resources it needs to uphold the rights of workers across the state.

Sincerely,

Elliot Levin
Research Director and Oregon Legislative Advocate