

Testimony to Support HB 2957

May 6, 2025

Senate Labor and Business Committee

Luz Ramirez-Tarin Testimony in Support of HB 2957

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham, and members of the Committee, my name is Luz Ramirez-Tarin and I am here in support of HB 2957 because I believe that individuals who experience discrimination at work should not be punished for taking action by filing a complaint with the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI).

I am a mother of four and throughout my life I have taken pride in helping members of my community here in Oregon whenever I can, whether that is by providing free rides to medical appointments, Spanish translation services, or just a friendly face to listen when someone is going through something difficult.

In March of 2021, I found myself in a difficult situation of my own. I had been working for the State of Oregon since 2019, and during that time I had spoken up several times about comments in the workplace that referenced my race and national origin. I received a negative review in early 2021 that criticized me for not being able to work in harmony with a coworker who had been making those types of comments. Two months later, after complaining repeatedly about how I was being treated, I was abruptly terminated.

Because I was still on probationary employee status at the time, I did not have the same ability to bring a grievance through the union, so I reached out to BOLI to seek justice for how I had been treated. I did my best to navigate the BOLI process and eventually filed a complaint in December 2021. BOLI investigated my complaints and in December 2022 found “substantial evidence” that I was discriminated against on the basis of my race and national origin. I received something called a “Notice of Right to File Civil Suit” letter that said I had 90 days to file my case in court. At that point, I realized I would need help from an attorney because I did not know how to write and file a lawsuit in court on my own by March 2023.

Instead of having a festive holiday season with my family and friends, I spent the next month calling attorneys’ offices trying to find an attorney to represent me. I told my story to at least ten different attorneys but none of them took my case. I quickly learned that the 90-day filing deadline from the BOLI letter was the main reason why. Eventually, in January 2023, I finally found an attorney who took my case, and I spent the next month driving up to Portland repeatedly to work with them on getting all the documents and information they needed. During the process I learned that if I had not filed a BOLI complaint then I would have had five years from when I had been discriminated against to file my case in court, rather than the 90-day deadline I got.

As employees, we are told that we are safe and protected at work. However, my situation made me realize that although those rights exist on paper, employees often have to take action on their own behalf to make sure they are followed. I do not believe it is right for someone to lose time to file their case in court just because they tried to seek justice by filing with BOLI like I did. Thankfully my situation worked out well in the end, but I am here before you today to urge you to vote yes on HB 2957 so that other people are not punished with a shorter deadline that could completely prevent them from ever seeking justice through our court system. Thank you.