



June 24, 2025

Re: Support for SB 174

Chair Bowman, Vice Chair Drazan, Vice Chair Pham, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Suzanne Veaudry Casaus, and I serve as the Education Program Manager at MESO (Micro Enterprise Services of Oregon). I am writing in strong support of SB 174, which will strengthen consumer protections in Oregon's insurance industry.

At MESO, our mission is to elevate under-resourced and excluded entrepreneurs to build resilience, equity, and thriving communities through access to capital, tailored business assistance, and education. MESO primarily serves emerging small business owners, many of whom are operating businesses that are less than two years old. These entrepreneurs rely on their personal credit to secure business financing, as traditional lenders often evaluate the owner's creditworthiness before approving loans. This makes fair and reliable insurance coverage critical—not just as a safeguard for their businesses but also for their financial stability and future growth.

For the entrepreneurs we serve, insurance is not optional—it is often legally required and a key component of business survival. Liability insurance protects them from lawsuits, property insurance safeguards their investments in equipment and inventory, and health insurance ensures they can continue operating without devastating medical costs. Yet, when insurance companies engage in deceptive practices, delay claims, or deny legitimate coverage, these small business owners often have no viable recourse. One denied claim or bad faith practice can mean the difference between keeping their business afloat or closing their doors permanently.

Why SB 174 Is Critical for Small Business Owners

Oregon's insurance industry is the only major industry not covered under the Unlawful Trade Practices Act (UTPA). This leaves small business owners and consumers vulnerable to unethical practices without the protections available in other industries. SB 174 would:



- Ensure fairness by holding insurance companies to the same legal standards as other industries.
- Protect small business owners from deceptive and unfair practices, ensuring they receive the coverage they pay for.
- Support economic resilience, allowing emerging entrepreneurs to recover from setbacks rather than being forced out of business due to bad faith insurance practices.

The Impact on Oregon's Entrepreneurs

- Many of MESO's clients are BIPOC, women, and immigrant entrepreneurs who already face systemic barriers to capital and business success.
- A single denied insurance claim can have long-term financial consequences, impacting their personal credit and ability to secure future funding.
- Fair and accountable insurance practices help build economic equity, ensuring that all entrepreneurs have a fighting chance to succeed.

At MESO, we work every day to ensure that under-resourced business owners have the tools they need to thrive. A fair and transparent insurance industry is essential to that mission. I urge you to support SB 174 to protect Oregon's small business owners from fraudulent and unethical insurance practices.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to strengthening consumer protections in Oregon.

Sincerely,

**Suzanne Veaudry Casaus
Education Program Manager
MESO (Micro Enterprise Services of Oregon)
Portland, Oregon**