

Submitter: Michelle Fussell
On Behalf Of: Iron Workers
Committee: Senate Committee On Labor and Business
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1566

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Hayden, and members of the committee, my name is Michelle Fussell. I'm here representing ironworkers, and testifying on SB 1566 because this bill directly affects the members I represent.

I want to be very clear: erecting multi-storied buildings is not simple construction. These buildings require full structural system that includes steel framing, reinforcing steel, connections, load paths, and seismic systems that must perform together as one engineered structure.

It also includes modern systems like mass timber, including cross laminated timber. These timber systems are still structural systems. It all still carries load. It still requires precise erection, proper connections, and coordination with steel and concrete elements. Ironworkers are trained to erect these systems safely and correctly, whether the structure is steel, hybrid, or mass timber.

At this scale, mistakes are not cosmetic. Errors in erection, alignment, or sequencing can compromise structural performance, especially in seismic zones like Oregon. This is high-risk, high-skill work that requires experience, training, and a workforce that is stable enough to retain that expertise.

Prevailing wage is not a luxury, it is a mechanism that maintains a skilled workforce on these projects. When wages are lowered, we don't get the same level of experience on site. We see higher turnover, lower training standards, and more pressure to rush structural work that should never be rushed. That is not theory. That is what happens in the field.

Cutting wages does not make these projects cheaper in any meaningful way. Labor is not the driver of housing costs. Lowering wages in order to "solve" the affordable housing crisis makes no sense when it actually helps perpetuate it—by pushing skilled workers out of the industry and weakening the workforce we rely on to build housing safely and efficiently.

Affordable housing should not be built at a lower safety standard. Publicly funded projects should not incentivize less-skilled labor on structurally complex buildings. If the state is going to allow construction up to seven stories, it must also protect the workforce capable of building those structures safely.

Ironworkers build. It's what we do. We build affordable housing units every day in every state. But we cannot support a policy that removes or reduces prevailing wage. Asking skilled workers to accept less than a fair day's wage is unacceptable.

For those reasons, we strongly oppose SB 1566.

Thank you.