

March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021

Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair  
Senator Chuck Thomsen, Vice-Chair  
Senator Sara Gelser  
Senator Chris Gorsek  
Senator Art Robinson

I am writing to encourage support for SENATE BILL 623 –THE COVID RECOVERY AND WORKFORCE MODERNIZATION ACT OF 2021, Introduced by Senator Lew Frederick. Co-sponsored by Representative Jeff Reardon

We are living through one of the worst economic downturns since the great depression. COVID-19 caused unemployment claims to reach nearly 400,000 and many experts predict the state will take years to return to pre-pandemic job levels. While the pandemic is not over, the crisis quickly revealed how precarious the economy currently is for those on the lower end of the wage and experience spectrum:

- 86 percent of workers who lost jobs in the immediate aftermath of COVID-19 earned less than \$40,000 per year.
- People of Color, women, immigrants, rural residents, young workers, and those with a high school diploma or less are disproportionately impacted by the economic downturn.


Many of these workers were left behind by the decade of growth and tighter labor markets following the great recession.

The COVID crisis exposed serious deficiencies in Oregon's programs and systems intended to provide a safety net during challenging times. From the provision of unemployment insurance to access to childcare many critical programs and services have failed to meet the challenges posed by COVID-19.

To return stronger from the COVID-19 crisis, we must commit to those Oregonians most impacted by the COVID crisis that we will not go back to the way things were. Historical inequities highlighted by the crisis cannot be allowed to continue. Oregon must fundamentally redesign the systems that respond to inevitable changes in the labor force and economy. Without question, this redesign must put racial equity and front-line workers at the center. The redesign must also put decision making and solution building as close to the community as possible - allowing local communities to respond to local economic circumstances, priorities, and needs.

SB 623 creates a framework to ensure the public workforce system is responsive to the needs of individuals and communities most impacted by COVID-19, supports local engagement and priorities, and sets the stage for continuous improvement of public workforce investments and programs. SB 623 will strengthen our commitment to Oregonians throughout the state by redesigning our workforce development system to put front line workers and racial justice at the center of the system. Decision-making and solutions-building will be as close to those we serve as possible – to allow local communities to respond to local economic circumstances, priorities, and needs.

This is important legislation – your support could help change the trajectory of the entire workforce system in Oregon – paving the way for real change. Please support SB 623

David Green   
Community Banker  
Board President, Clackamas Workforce Partnership  
Past Board President, Cascade Capital Funding, an SBA Certified Development Company  
Board President, Oregon City Rotary Club Foundation