

February 20, 2012 -- Dear Members of the Oregon State Senate,

My name is Dr. Sean Harry and I am writing to urge you to pass the Fair Opportunity Act (SB1548). This is important legislation that will prohibit employers from excluding the unemployed for consideration in job postings. I have found this practice to be not only unwise, but also quite discriminatory as it presents another huge barrier to employment for Oregonians who have been out of work for an extended period of time. Let me explain.

I am an ordained minister and have for the past 6 years been working in the field of Human Resources as a Career Counselor and Advisor. I have my own private practice. I have also worked in this area as a Advisor for Portland State University, and with major outplacement companies Drake Beam Morin (DBM) and Lee Hecht Harrison (LHH). In the latter roles I participated in a massive "outplacement" movement that has been taking place since the fall of 2008. As you know, many corporations in Oregon were forced to lay off hundreds of thousands of workers due to the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. When those workers were let go many of them were given outplacement services through DBM and LHH. I have personally led workshops for and coached thousands of these people who were unfortunate enough to fall into this category.

In my work as an outplacement provider I have met an unprecedented number of people with more 20 to 30 years of experience with the same company. Needless to say, these men and women are over the age of 40, with many of them in their 50s and even 60s. They have a tremendous amount of knowledge and skill. The vast majority of them were not terminated due to negligence or incompetence, but because their jobs (and even entire companies) ceased to exist. I have found them to be highly competent and in possession of a strong work ethic. They do not enjoy receiving unemployment benefits -- which, by the way, represent a huge pay cut as many of these people held high paying jobs.

There is absolutely no reason why these people should be categorically denied the opportunity to apply for a position simply due to external economic conditions.

I urge you to pass this bill. SB 1548 is a modest proposal that does NOT require an employer to hire a person who has been unemployed. It simply provides opportunities for men and women who have been out of the workforce for an extended period of time. Please help Oregon be a leader in this economic recession by eliminating this dangerous and discriminatory practice.

Sincerely,

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