

OREGON LAW CENTER

921 SW Washington, Suite 516
Portland, Or. 97205

TESTIMONY in SUPPORT OF SB 1548 Before the House Committee on Business and Labor February 20th, 2012

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SUBMITTED BY: Sybil #666

Co-Chairs Garrett and Kennemer, and members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, I submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 1548, which proposes reasonable protection against unfair treatment for job applicants who are currently unemployed. Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments.

The Oregon Law Center's mission is to achieve access to justice for low-income communities of Oregon. The vast majority of our clients have incomes at or below the federal poverty level, and work hard to provide the basic necessities for themselves and their family. During recent years of escalating economic crisis, lay-offs and job reductions have thrown many formerly middle-class families into crisis. These sorts of lay-offs and reductions have no bearing on an individual's skill level or job performance. As a result of increased lay-offs, we have seen a marked increase in the number of people on the brink of poverty, and a marked increase in the level of crisis facing families.

As Oregonians who have lost their jobs struggle to re-enter the workplace, they face many challenges. The competition is fierce, and the jobs are few. Applicants must juggle job searches, application forms, child care duties, transportation and interview expenses, re-training and more, often over a period of many months during a time when their financial resources are dwindling. These challenges are great enough, without the added barrier of disqualification on the basis of whether or not they are currently employed.

HB 1548 proposes reasonable and important protections against this crude practice. The bill does not propose to alter in any way an employers' ability to make determinations about job applicants' work experience, skill level, capacity, or references. The bill simply protects against the blanket use of a blunt screening factor that has no bearing on an applicant's potential job performance.

Experts say that one factor in Oregon's recent small drop in the unemployment rate is that so many unemployed people have given up the struggle to find work. This legislation would send a strong message to unemployed job applicants who were laid off through no fault of their own that they can no longer be disqualified simply on the basis of their unemployment. The legislation would remove a barrier to success for struggling Oregonians and we urge your support.