



April 5, 2013

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Chair Doherty and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Joe Gallegos. I represent House District 30, which includes the Cities of Hillsboro and North Plains, and some unincorporated Washington County. Before you today are House Bills 3041 and 304; both of which deal with the prevalent and issue of wage inequity in Oregon. It is surprising to me that many people still believe that wage inequity does not exist. They believe that discrimination in the work place is not a problem these days – not in 2013. I'm here to tell you that it is a problem, and that it can be remedied.

Current law protects against wage discrimination based on sex. House Bill 3042 would extend protections to include: Race, color, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, disability, and age. A recent U.S. Census study found that women, on average, made 78 cents for every dollar that men earned. When factoring in race, they found that African-American women earned even less, 68.7 cents per dollar that men earned. Hispanic women earn *even less*, 59 cents per dollar.

Colleagues, I don't have to tell you that this is wrong, flat out. When employees perform work that is comparable in character and with comparable skill, they should be judged based on how well they do the job, not on characteristics that have no bearing on their abilities. You may ask how equal pay for equal work will affect businesses. I can address that by saying that employers decide how their employees are paid, and how jobs are valued, as they should.

This does *not* allow the state to set wages, only to require that a legitimate and non-discriminatory system be used to set wages between employees. Fair pay practices will also help employees feel valued, raising their productivity and helping companies recruit talented individuals.

This issue is about paying people based on their ability, not other factors. But the startling reality is that employers – even in 2013 – are denying a living wage to Oregonians not because of poor work or lack of skill, but because of the worker's race, sexual orientation, or other factors covered in this bill. Until we extend the coverage currently given to people based on gender, workers will not be adequately protected.

Colleagues, we need to make a statement for equality by passing this bill. This bill will enforce the idea that every Oregonian should be compensated fairly for the work that he or she does – plain and simple. We need to give the Bureau of Labor and Industries the teeth and ability to protect Oregonians and make our state a fair and attractive place to live and work.

Having spent over 30 years in social work education, social work remains a feminine profession. I often had 95-99% women in my classes. And, I would teach about majority and minority status. I always wondered why my female students did not rally against their co-workers, why they did not protest their oppression. The psychology of oppression internalizes the status prevents people from resisting. That does not make it right.

Thank you,

Representative Joseph Gallegos, HD 30

