

John A. Kitzhaber, MD
Governor



Written Testimony for SB 831

Wednesday, May 8, 2013

Ways and Means Economic Development and Transportation Subcommittee

Hearing Room 174

Co-Chair Johnson, Co-Chair Jenson, and members of the committee;

My name is Agnes Balassa. I am Governor Kitzhaber's Policy Advisor for Workforce. I am providing written testimony in support of SB 831. Pre-apprenticeship programs, pre-employment counseling, orientations to the trades, basic skills improvement, career counseling, remedial training, supportive services, assistance with transportation, child care and other special needs, and job site mentoring and retention services are strategies used throughout the country to support a more diverse workforce in the trades. These activities are allowable under state and federal law, and are currently in use by Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). SB 831 gives us an opportunity to increase resources for these programs within ODOT's budget.

High way construction jobs provide living wages and opportunities to support families. Oregon has worked for many years to increase the ethnic and racial diversity of this workforce and to encourage more women to enter it. The programs described in SB 831 are specifically targeted to assure that more minorities and women consider, enter into, and succeed in the trades. Unfortunately, current resources limit the ability to provide these programs throughout the state, with the result that services are concentrated in the Portland Metro area.

I have experienced how powerful the programs described in SB 831 can be. Working for Wider Opportunities for Women, a national leader in helping women enter into and succeed in non-traditional careers in construction, transportation, and other trades, I created technical assistance teams to implement recruitment, training, mentoring and support services programs to help women enter into a variety of the trades. Many of the women served by these programs had never considered careers in the trades, but were also struggling to find jobs in more traditional women-dominated fields that could support their families and feed their interests. Pre-apprenticeships, pre-employment counseling and other services helped them decide whether to enter training for the trades. Educational supports helped them succeed in training, and support services like child care and mentoring helped them enter into well-paid jobs.

Oregon's commitment to assuring that a recovering economy raises prospects for all citizens and results in greater prosperity is supported by investing in programs like these that help all citizens, across the state, access opportunities for good jobs.