

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

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April 12, 2013

Testimony on HB 3307

House Committee on Business and Labor

Chair Doherty, Vice Chair Barton, Vice Chair Kennemer, and members of the Committee

My name is Rex Hagans. I am here today representing Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO). We urge you to support HB 3307, which provides a remedy to wronged workers whose employers fail to provide and pay for the work breaks required by regulations of the Bureau of Labor and Industry.

As a statewide association of religious denominations, congregations and community-based cooperative ministries, EMO represents hundreds of Oregonians in every rural and urban community throughout the state. Our testimony today emanates from our shared religious values, which affirm the value and dignity of every human being and a concern for every person's well being. This is why we ask you to support human dignity and security by supporting HB 3307.

Despite the existence of basic wage and hour laws and regulations in our state, some employers continue to disregard them, in ways both large and small. Unfortunately, these violations are most often committed against low wage workers.

Low-wage workers who don't get paid fairly are left without sufficient money to provide food and shelter for their families. Such actions not only violate the law, they also transgress basic moral principles. Jewish and Christian scriptures are unequivocal: "Thou shalt not steal." From Deuteronomy 24:15 we read: "You must pay out the wages due on the same day, before the sun sets. For the worker is needy and urgently depends on it."

Breaks are vitally important to workers and especially to those performing physical or repetitive labor. The disabled also require breaks. Consider the person with diabetes who must eat regularly, check his blood sugar level, and take insulin. Failure to provide breaks is also a safety issue.

HB 3307 provides a remedy to wronged workers for failure of their employer to provide and pay for required breaks. It also provides an incentive to employers who fail to provide required breaks and/or do not pay for them to change their behavior.

Ultimately, the practice of denying workers rights as required by regulation harms all workers, honest employers, our communities, and our state revenues. When this occurs, work becomes a form of exploitation. In the face of exploitation and injustice, Oregon's faith communities will not stay silent, and neither should our elected officials.

I urge you to support HB 3307. It will help ensure ethical treatment of our workers and contribute to a more just and prosperous future for all Oregonians.

Respectfully,

Dr. Rex Hagans, Vice Chair, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon Public Policy Advisory Committee

MEASURE: HB 3307
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