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Testimony in favor of SB143 – Creation of the Office of Small Business Assistance

Submitted by Alan Hickenbottom

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Good afternoon Mr. Chairman, members of the committee.

My name is Alan Hickenbottom, I am the general manager of the Energy Services Group for Christenson Electric, a 70-year old, 350-person IBEW electrical contractor located in Portland. For those of you in the Portland area, or around the state for that matter, you may have seen our red vans. I am also on the board of the OBA. I am here to testify in favor of SB143, the establishment of the Office of Small Business Assistance.

I'm probably a bit of rare bird, that of pro-business Democrat. I've referred to folks like me as tree hugging capitalists. With that, I have little patience for the whole pro-government vs. pro-business debate. Its not either or. It's about each serving its proper role. In the case of the public sector, I believe its role is to provide the services for which it is best suited and to create and maintain a stable foundation, the infrastructure on which the private sector can create, build and grow. As this philosophy relates to SB143, its about continuing to ensure that the Oregon Corporation Division provides the correct and highest possible level of service to Oregon entrepreneurs and businesses – those same entrepreneurs and businesses that generate the tax revenue for the vital services best provided by the public sector such as education and public safety. Again, not either or; but the right role for each. As proposed, I believe SB143 is an important part of that effort and I would urge your support.

I've had my own company or worked for other entrepreneurs for most of my career and have utilized services of the Oregon Corporation Division many times over the years. The move to a web-based system made access to the division's resources much easier for people across the state. Now, I spent many years in hi-tech. Navigating websites is something I've been doing since the web became a thing in the mid-nineties. But this isn't true for everyone. And even with my experience in technology, unfamiliar systems can be daunting. Having the ability to easily access a qualified human in this process would make the existing resources much more useful. In today's digital world, it is easier to gain market presence, reach partners, vendors and customers than ever before. And while competitive pressures will always be with us, the barriers to reaching a market have dramatically fallen in the Internet age. To the extent that the Office of Small Business Assistance would lower the barriers to interfacing with state government, that would be a very good thing. As written, this bill has a limited scope with targeted, but important goals. To my mind, it represents the right role for the public sector in its effort to assist the private sector in creating jobs. So, in conclusion, I would ask for your support of SB 143.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you today. I look forward to any questions.