

INTERFAITH MOVEMENT FOR IMMIGRANT JUSTICE

BECAUSE LOVE HAS NO BORDERS

March 10, 2013

Representative Doherty, Chair
Representative Kennemer, Co-Vice Chair
Representative Barton, Co-Vice Chair
House Business and Labor Committee
Oregon Legislative Assembly

Re: HB 2976, HB 2977, and HB 3142

Dear Chair Doherty, Co-Vice Chair Kennemer, Co-Vice Chair Barton, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to you as a board member and treasurer of the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice (IMrJ) in support of HB 2976, HB 2977, three bills that intend to reduce the incidence of wage theft in our community.

IMrJ is an interfaith coalition of over 30 different religious leaders, congregatants and volunteers who are called by our faith to respond actively and publicly to issues of fairness and human rights of our immigrant brothers and sisters residing in the Oregon. We believe and affirm that everyone, regardless of national origin, has basic common rights, including but not limited to: 1) livelihood; 2) family unity; and 3) physical and emotional safety. We are proud members of the Coalition to Stop Wage Theft.

We ask you to support HB 2976, HB 2977, and HB 3142. These bills, when passed, will reduce the incidences of wage theft and will provide a more effective means to collect wages owed.

As you know, wage theft occurs when workers are underpaid or not paid at all for the wages earned. It occurs when workers do not receive minimum wage, the agreed rate or overtime, when they are paid under the table or in cash, when they are not paid tips or when workers are misclassified as contractors. Independent contractors have no guarantees of minimum wage and overtime. They are not directly covered by workers' compensation and are not eligible for unemployment compensation.

Wage theft occurs in most industries and affects all people. But the stealing of wages disproportionately impacts the low-wage workers. These workers are left without money to pay for food, shelter, and provide for their children. Wage theft denies exploited workers of their dignity.

Our religious traditions are very clear that wages must be paid to workers. For example, the Hebrew bible implores that: *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; else a cry to the Eternal will be issued against you and you will incur guilt.* (Deuteronomy 24:15)

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Wage theft harms all workers, honest employers, our communities, and our state revenues.

- Wage theft creates a disadvantage for the majority of Oregon employers who pay their workers living wages. They must compete against those who reduce their costs by not paying workers what they are owed or who do not pay living wages.
- Communities suffer because workers have less income.
- The State of Oregon is cheated of revenue, because no taxes are collected from unpaid wages. Similarly no workers' compensation or unemployment compensation is collected.

We strongly support passage of this legislation that will reduce the incidence of wage theft and make it easier for those that are impacted to receive what is owed.

Please support HB 2976, HB 2977, and HB 3142 in committee and on the House floor.

All workers should be paid for their labor.

Sincerely,

(signed) Robert Brown
Treasurer, Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice