

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

Serving together in faith

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March 13, 2013

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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:

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) is a statewide association of religious denominations, congregations and community-based cooperative ministries representing hundreds of Oregonians in every rural and urban community throughout the state of Oregon. Our testimony today emanates from our shared religious values that affirm the value and dignity of every human being and a concern for their well being. We ask you to support HB 2976, HB 2977, and HB 3142. These bills will reduce wage theft and provide means to collect wages owed.

All too many Oregon workers face the threat of underpayment or non-payment for their labor. This occurs when workers do not receive minimum wage or the agreed rate or overtime, when they are paid under the table or in cash, when they are not paid tips, and too often not paid at all. EMO strives for justice for all, and to act in solidarity with those on the margins. Our mandate from Holy Scripture is to “love our neighbor as ourselves” and to speak out, especially when the most vulnerable are treated unethically.

We recognize that an increasing problem area is in the mislabeling of employees as independent contractors. These “independent contractors” have no guarantees of minimum wage and overtime. They do not receive workers’ compensation or unemployment compensation. They are not covered by anti-discrimination laws. EMO’s social principles call us not only to acknowledge the inherent dignity of all people, but to also resist any attempt to denigrate their full potential. We believe that a healthy society must provide for the well being of all.

Wage theft occurs in most industries and affects all people. But it affects the low-wage workers whose wages are stolen the most. These workers are left without money to pay for food, shelter, and provide for their children. Wage theft denies exploited workers of their dignity. Justice requires us to establish social and economic systems that encourage, enable and empower us all to use our capabilities to meet our needs and to contribute to social welfare.

Ultimately, wage theft harms all workers, honest employers, our communities, and our state revenues. It 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 are stressed. Community and faith organizations must step in to provide the most basic needs, because earned wages have been stolen. The State of Oregon is also denied revenue, because no taxes are collected from unpaid wages. Similarly no workers' compensation or unemployment compensation is collected.

I urge your support of HB 2976, HB 2977, and HB 3142. These bills help ensure the ethical treatment of our workers and will contribute to a more just and prosperous future for all Oregonians.

Respectfully,

David Leslie, Executive Director
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