

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES *of* OREGON

Serving together in faith

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March 9, 2015

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Members of the Senate Committee on Workforce

Testimony to the Senate Workforce Committee in support of SB 718

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My name is Jan Elfers, and I am the Public Policy Director for Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO). We urge you to support SB 718, which provides workers with stronger tools to expose employer wrongdoing and to recover earned wages that are not paid by employers—in essence, wages that are stolen.

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 wellbeing. This is why we ask you to support human dignity and security by supporting these bills.

Despite the existence of basic wage and hour laws in our state, wage theft is widespread in Oregon—from minimum wage and overtime violations to complete non-payment of wages. 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." Unfortunately some employers do not follow these basic moral rules. As a result, low wage workers and their families struggle to pay their bills and may face unstable housing and hard choices on whether to spend what money they have for food and medical expenses. We have seen congregation members face these challenges too often.

Ultimately, wage theft harms all workers, honest employers, our communities, and our state revenues. When wage theft occurs, work becomes a form of exploitation. In the face of such exploitation and injustice, Oregon's faith communities will not stay silent, and neither should our elected officials. SB 718 is a fair approach to combatting wage theft, giving workers new tools without overburdening honest employers.

I urge you to support SB 718. This bill will help ensure the ethical treatment of our workers and will contribute to a more just and prosperous future for all Oregonians.

Respectfully,

Jan Elfers
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
Director of Public Policy