

Testimony of Cara Shufelt,
Executive Director of the Rural Organizing Project
In Support of SB 718
Senate Workforce Committee
March 9, 2015

Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Thatcher, Members of the Senate Committee on Workforce,

The Rural Organizing Project (ROP), a statewide organization of locally-based groups that work to create communities accountable to a standard of human dignity, supports SB 718. The Rural Organizing Project started in 1992 based in grassroots human dignity groups in rural counties throughout Oregon. Since then we have grown to where we now have 49 groups in 28 counties.

We are working towards a vision of economic security and fairness for all. We want our communities to thrive. We want an economy that works for all of us with safety nets that leave no one behind. We want dignity for all workers.

That is why ROP opposes wage theft. Wage theft hurts workers and their families and it hurts honest businesses. It hurts our communities. SB 718 provides workers with a new set of tools to fight back. It will make it harder for law-breaking employers to avoid responsibility and easier for workers to get help and get paid.

Beginning in the late 1970's, Oregon's rural economy entered a tailspin that it has not emerged from to this day. The recession of the early 80's was a true depression in timber-dependent communities. Tens of thousands of high-paying union jobs disappeared as lumber and paper mills closed and logging operations shut down. Small businesses went bankrupt and main streets began to atrophy. The timber economy had supported a prosperous small-town lifestyle since the end of World War II. The 2008 recession simply exacerbated an already desperate situation for many rural counties and for many rural families. Rural and small town families are struggling. We cannot afford to stand by and let unscrupulous employers cut the feet out from under us.

We have heard countless stories of tips being taken, workers never getting paid for a full day's labor, or paychecks that do not cover all the hours worked. Rural Oregonians need simple, clear and accountable ways to address wage theft.

Please support SB 718. Thank you.