



March 17, 2015

Testimony to Senate Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness  
Provided by: Paloma Sparks, Legislative Director, Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries

The Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of the -1 amendment to SB 87, which would clarify the existing veterans' preference law.

As you know the Bureau of Labor and Industries enforces anti-discrimination laws that apply to workplaces, housing and public accommodations; enforces wage and hour laws; educates employers to avoid unnecessary worker complaints; and partners with labor, business and other organizations to develop a highly-skilled, competitive workforce in Oregon.

The Bureau enforces the current veterans' preference in public employment under our civil rights laws. Our approach to veterans' hiring ensures that veterans have a fair and meaningful shot at a job while providing clarity to employers seeking to navigate Oregon's law.

In 2014, this committee directed BOLI to lead a workgroup to review veterans' preference. The correspondence from the committee states that it was the "legislature's intent that qualified veterans should be interviewed." We agree.

Early on, the workgroup reached consensus on the goal of ensuring that veterans are being afforded opportunities to compete for public sector jobs and are given the chance to demonstrate how their transferrable skills qualify them for jobs. The workgroup also discussed some definitional issues to help clarify the law. During this process, a subgroup discussed definitions and met to draft a proposed policy statement. The documents that resulted were helpful to the discussion. However, the subgroup proposed a number of significant policy changes that concerned BOLI.

Our strong position is that every *qualified* veteran should be interviewed and that the preference should apply at every stage of the hiring process. As an agency dedicated to protecting the rights of veterans, it is our belief that the existing law should not be scaled back to change either existing protection. There is room for compromise with some members of the workgroup to clarify the definition of "qualified" and keep other requirements of the existing law in place. That is why we are supporting the -1 amendment to reflect that.

Although some may want to change the preference to only apply to some veterans for initial interviews, BOLI opposes efforts to weaken the law. The veterans who have served our country have tremendous talents to offer our state. BOLI stands ready to protect their rights while providing clarity for Oregon employers, including our agency partners.

I urge you to support the -1 amendment to SB 87. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer questions.

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