



April 24, 2015

Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair
Senate Committee on Workforce
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Support for HB 2544

Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee:

The Professional and Technical Employees (PTE), Local 17, represents approximately 9,000 public employees in Washington and Oregon across sixteen employers, including about 750 who work for the City of Portland as engineers, planners, technicians, and other similar classifications.

HB 2544 will correct a broken incentive structure that currently exists within Oregon's expedited bargaining statute. Currently, an employer wishing to make changes to a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) during the life of the contract is incentivized to enter the expedited bargaining process and simply run out the clock, because no realistic remedy exists for unions to prevent the employer from unilaterally implementing at the end of 90 days. Strikes, aside from being highly costly for both employers and employees, are a poor and unrealistic counterbalance to the employer's ability to implement, and are often barred by collective bargaining agreements.

HB 2544 would balance the incentive structure of expedited bargaining by providing for interest arbitration at the end of 90 days. In our experience, interest arbitration is a process that both employers and unions will seek to avoid through a negotiated compromise – neither the union nor the employer wish to engage in costly, lengthy, and risky arbitration if it can be avoided. We believe that a mutually agreed upon solution should be the goal of all labor negotiations, and thus HB 2544 would incentivize a return to healthier and more productive labor relations. In cases where a negotiated agreement cannot be reached, arbitration provides a fair and impartial way to determine the best solution for the public interest, which is superior to the blunt instrument of unilateral implementation.

We thank you for your consideration of this matter, and urge you to join us in our support for HB 2544.

Sincerely,

Elliot Levin
Research Director and Legislative Advocate
Professional and Technical Employees Local 17

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