



THE
BUS
PROJECT

February 4, 2016

Members of the Senate Workforce and General Government Committee,

My name is Nikki Fisher and I'm the Executive Director of the Bus Project. The Oregon Bus Project is Oregon's leading organization that focuses on millennial outreach, voter engagement and education, and building strong and impactful leadership programs. Our unique advocacy is built on a style that is run and organized by young people for young people. We try to amplify the voice of millennial generation.

We are writing to thank you for your consideration of SB 1587 to stop wage theft in Oregon. SB 1587 paves the way for Oregon to be a national leader in enforcing wage laws, protecting workers, and collecting unpaid wages, and builds a foundation for comprehensive wage theft reform in 2017.

Wage theft is an epidemic that costs workers nationwide billions of dollars a year. While most employers in our communities do right by their workers, too many do not. It's time to end workplace abuses and illegal employment practices that leave too many workers and their families shortchanged.

Wage theft happens to workers in all industries. From retail, restaurants, and grocery stores, to domestic work, construction and personal services—Oregon workers are cheated out of millions of dollars every year. Many don't report violations out of fear of retaliation. Women, people of color, immigrants, and low-wage workers are more vulnerable to wage theft.

Laws protecting workers from wage theft aren't being enforced. Even when workers go through the difficult process of winning a wage theft claim, many never see a dime. State agencies are understaffed and often overwhelmed, so they can only reach a portion of the many cases of wage theft in Oregon. From 2010 to 2013, Oregon employers only paid 28 percent of the stolen wages they were ordered to give back to workers. That is why the limited private right of action that is in this bill is a critical component of the effort to stop wage theft. Today, many companies violate wage theft laws because they don't believe they'll be held accountable.

Stopping wage theft gives workers the pay they deserve. Workers can be sure they're paid what they're owed—and they aren't cheated out of the opportunity to provide for our families. It's easier to stand up to dishonest employers when workers understand the law. When we know we are protected from retaliation, workers will be more likely to speak out about this abusive practice without fear of losing our jobs.

Thank you for accepting testimony on behalf of the Bus Project.

Sincerely,

Nikki Fisher
Executive Director

Volunteer-Driven Democracy for Our Generation

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