



Chris Hewitt
Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1587
February 4, 2016

Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 1587 and for your consideration of this legislation to strengthen wage enforcement in our state. ONA represents nearly 14,000 nurses across the state, including staff nurses at many large acute care hospitals, public health facilities and small clinics.

Wage theft is an issue that costs workers nationwide billions of dollars a year, and nurses have not been immune its impact in our state. While the majority of employers in our communities do right by their workers, there are still too many that do not. A variety of employers violate wage theft laws today because they do not believe they'll be held accountable, including in some instances, within the healthcare sector.

In 2013, an incident of widespread timecard alteration was uncovered at a large Portland-based medical center, following a hospital-wide grievance and concurrent class action legal suit. Hospital unit managers were found to be manipulating nurse and other workers' electronic time records, potentially as an artificial cost-saving strategy. This case resulted in a system-wide settlement for all workers throughout the state that had been employed since September, 2007.

It is due in part to the experience of incidents like this that Oregon's nurses understand the need for Senate Bill 1587 as a means to provide for greater wage enforcement and stronger employer accountability in Oregon. ONA members fully recognize that not all workers have the benefit and protections of a collective bargaining agreement or the ability to file a grievance with their employer to resolve these types of issues.

As such, SB 1587 would provide workers with more tools to address employer wrongdoing by ensuring we have access to wage and hour records including pay stubs. Employers who deny access to such records would also face stronger consequences. The bill makes it simpler for workers to obtain legal assistance and reduces obstacles involved with recovering wages owed. This proposal also equips state agencies with additional capacity to enforce existing wage and hour laws as well as enhanced resources for dealing with repeated and or excessive violators.

Lastly, a key component of this bill is the access to civil justice provision, which decreases barriers and gives workers the option to enforce their own wage rights. Budget fluctuations and a diverse set of mandates make it hard for state agencies to fully enforce the law. To truly address wage theft in Oregon, any solution must be accompanied by private enforcement to allow workers to exercise their own rights.

For these reasons, ONA supports SB 1587 as it represents an important step towards better protecting *all* workers and their families from the damage of wage theft.

ONA urges your support of SB 1587.