

February 4, 2016

Members of the Senate Workforce and General Government Committee,

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.

The Urban League of Portland was established in 1945. We are one of the oldest African American service, civil rights and advocacy organizations in the area. We have departments that span from youth programming, to employments services to our seniors program. In working with people seeking employment we hear countless stories of wage theft, but also get to see the widespread effect it has on a person's life and livelihood.

The Urban League of Portland believes this bill will have a positive impact on the community we serve. We have seen time and time again what abuse has done to our community. We know this is exactly what wage theft is: a crime. It is a crime that makes it difficult for people to spend time with and provide for their families. The people most impacted are low income adults who already struggle to provide for their families and sometimes are afraid of reporting it for fear of losing the only source of income they have. We also know that punishing employers is not always the right route. This bill doesn't punish them, but instead changes their practices to be within the laws already in place and to be held accountable to their employees. This is why we support this bill; it is exactly what the people we serve need. We need accountability. We need to stop wage theft.

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 makes it tough for Oregon families to get ahead. For a worker earning minimum wage, getting cheated out of 30 minutes of pay each day adds up to more than \$1,400 a year. For families struggling to get by, that can be the difference between paying rent on time and facing eviction.

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. From 2010 to 2013, Oregon employers only paid 28 percent of the stolen wages they were ordered to give back to workers. 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. Helps workers know the rules. 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.

By holding dishonest employers accountable, we can crack down on illegal employment practices and curb the race to the bottom that results in the loss of good jobs in the market overall. This levels the playing field and alleviates pressure on honest employers to find other ways to cut costs and strengthens our economy.

SB 1587 gives workers more tools to expose employer wrongdoing by ensuring we have access to wage and hour records including pay stubs. Employers who deny access to such records will be held accountable. The bill makes it easier for workers to find legal help and reduces barriers to help recover the wages workers are owed. It strengthens enforcement and accountability and provides state agencies with additional tools and resources to enforce existing wage and hour laws and hold excessive and intentional offenders accountable.