



February 11, 2016

Testimony to House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness
Paloma Sparks, Legislative Director, Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries

The Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) appreciates the opportunity to testify on HB 4096, which significantly affects the ability for a veteran to benefit from veterans preferences in hiring at public bodies.

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 for public sector jobs and are given the chance to demonstrate how their skills and experiences obtained in the military transfers to civilian positions. Some members of the workgroup proposed drastic changes to the existing veterans' preference law. Those changes were reflected in Senate Bill 87, which was introduced and failed to pass last session.

BOLI opposed SB 87 and continues to oppose efforts to scale back protections for veterans. House Bill 4096 concerns us because it eliminates a large pool of veterans from benefiting from a preference in hiring. There are various reasons why the proposal to limit eligibility to veterans who have left the military within the past 10 years. Veterans who have left the military more than 10 years ago could still lack civilian work experience. For instance –
What if they only had one job in that time? Shouldn't the veteran get the opportunity to show how their military work also makes them qualified for the job they have applied for?
What about veterans who struggled with re-entry and are trying to gain their footing 11 years after leaving the military?
Additionally, the legislature made a policy decision in 2009 to eliminate a 15-year limit for eligibility for veteran hiring preference. The legislature should not roll back the protection even further back.

This law is new and employers should work with the law rather than seeking to change it. There is room for compromise moving forward to address both the needs of state agencies and local governments and veterans. More discussion is needed before a significant change in the law is pursued.

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