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TO: Co-Chairs Johnson and Gomberg
Members of the Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development

FR: Graham Trainor, Oregon AFL-CIO

RE: *Oregon AFL-CIO Support for SB 5512, Workers Compensation Division*

February 23, 2017

My name is Graham Trainor, representing the over 300,000 working Oregonians of the Oregon AFL-CIO. Thanks for the opportunity to share a few brief supportive remarks from the perspective of a worker on the Workers' Compensation Division element of the DCBS budget.

The Oregon AFL-CIO has been the long-term advocate for greater worker protections and structures that make Oregon a safer and more fair place to work, and we continue to be a voice for all workers in the legislative process.

As you all are, I'm sure, very familiar with, Oregon's workers' comp system has not always been one that workers can be proud of. In 1989, Oregon's system ranked the highest in the country for workplace injury claims resulting in disability. At the same time it wasn't working for employers or insurers alike with the sixth highest premium costs in the country and the third highest in total medical costs per claim.

Due to the Mahonia Hall reforms, our workers' compensation system was put on a much more sustainable path balancing worker benefits with employer rates, establishing successful safety programs to reduce workplace injuries, all while improving worker benefits.

Today, at a time when some workers' compensation systems around the country are facing wildly imbalanced realities, we now have a greatly improved system by every measure including worker injuries and employer rates.

At the Oregon AFL-CIO, we believe that our balanced workers' compensation system is partly due to the guidance and thorough vetting that MLAC, the Management Labor Advisory Committee, provides the legislature on highly complex issues relating to the system. We still have confidence in MLAC's role and will continue to look for ways to improve its functionality and find qualified worker representatives to serve.

Another reason we believe the system is in balance is due to the Division's rulemaking process being inclusive of all perspectives. There have been some highly controversial workers' compensation issues before the legislature in the past few years where employers and worker advocates didn't agree, but the rulemaking processes coming out of those fights remained fair, open and inclusive.

One final comment on the workers' compensation system I'd like to make sure to include is the incredible value that the Ombudsman for Injured Workers plays as a resource for injured workers who are having difficulty navigating the system. As a worker advocate, I can't stress to you enough how intimidating, overwhelming and downright scary it can be if you've just been injured on the job and are looking for ways to access your well-deserved workers' compensation benefits. This role couldn't be more critical to help Oregon workers at a time when they need it most.

There are clearly other elements and structures within DCBS and its budget that workers find great value in, especially Oregon OSHA and its mission. Thank you for the opportunity to offer some supportive comments today specifically about the Workers' Compensation Division and its value to working Oregonians.