

Oppose HB 2856

HB 2856 appears to be intended to address a problem we've discussed many times in this building—employee rights in the workplace. As written, the bill would provide state funding to community organizations for their door-to-door outreach, community-based education events, etc. Although the bill states that it is to address “employee rights in the workplace”, one of the biggest targets of this activity, of course, is wage theft. We talked about wage theft two weeks ago in this committee, but the business community wants to reiterate that the topic is of ongoing concern to us; as the committee will recall, we worked with BOLI last session to fund additional enforcement agents to work with employers on this problem.

That program has only been in place for a short time, and it seems that before going in a different direction, the legislature should review and analyze the results of this most recent expenditure. However, if the Legislature decides to take additional steps on wage theft right now, we suggest adding to the existing program rather than create something entirely new. It is our position that Oregon's current budget situation does not lend itself to the creation a grant program that spends state dollars to support the work of private organizations.

New Penalties

Aside from allocating state dollars to supplement the funding of private organizations, HB 2856 increases penalties for a number of unlawful employment practices, in some cases without apparent justification. Of particular concern is that the bill imposes punitive damages on employers for violations of the new paid sick time law. This law took effect at the beginning of 2016, and many employers are struggling to absorb the costs associated with its implementation. It seems particularly unfair that after imposing such a heavy burden on employers, advocates now seek to increase penalties on noncomplying employers scarcely one year into the program, and without providing evidence of widespread noncompliance. Proposing a penalty such as this one is not only unjustified, it entirely disregards the enormous amount of effort that the employer community has put forth to comply with the new law over the last 12 months. We urge you to support the employer community in its efforts to combat wage theft and absorb new mandates, instead of imposing additional penalties and costs.

**Associated Oregon Industries
Chamber of Medford/Jackson County
Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers
Northwest Food Processors Association
Oregon Association of Nurseries
Oregon Business Association
Oregon Dairy Farmers Association
Oregon Farm Bureau
Oregon Homebuilders Association**

**Oregon Metals Industry Council
Oregon Plumbing, Heating & Cooling
Contractors
Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association
Oregon School Boards Association
Oregon Seed Council
Oregon State Chambers of Commerce
Oregon Trucking Association**