

Good afternoon. For the record, my name is Jens Knudsen. I am writing today to provide testimony in support of HB 2167.

I am a young college graduate and have served as a teacher in Oregon for over 2 years. Prior to this, I have worked other jobs in Oregon over the course of several more years. I am speaking to you today because we have a problem.

I am sure the issues we are facing are not specific to Oregon, but the situations I experienced have created an unproductive and unhealthy work atmosphere that moves Oregon backwards. Let me give you an idea of what being in the working class is like for people such as myself.

I worked a job for several summers operating heavy machinery. This happened to be in the presence of and service to non-workers, and thus an operator who did not perform the job with vigilance could see their customers hurt. During this time I saw many people performing unsafely, skipping safety inspections, and simply being negligent in their duties. I took my concerns to the foreman and their superiors when things were out of hand. For that I was barred from returning to work and told that I would not be welcomed back for a 3rd summer. However I was not told until eight months after the decision was made and was already flying back from my out-of-state school to begin my summer employment. What was I reporting? Someone reading a book while they were operating machinery.

A couple years later, at the start of my teaching career, I started a job mid-year to replace a teacher who was struggling to maintain emotional health. During this time I worked hard to make up for lost time in the curriculum and become a true part of the school community. I worked hard because I thought for sure I would be there for years. I was even looking for an apartment to rent closer to the school. At the end of the year, after all the promises to keep me, I was told that I would not have my contract renewed for another year. The school refused to provide any reason as to why they would not be welcoming me back.

Disheartened and more than a little depressed, I found another job in a new city teaching once again. I was optimistic for the change and set to put my best foot forward. I was hired, but found out soon after taking the job that there were some important questions I hadn't thought to ask. I very quickly learned that the safety equipment was either neglected, insufficient, completely inoperable, or didn't even exist at the school. Furthermore, I found out late that the budget for my science classes came out to less than 17 cents per student, and that almost all of the equipment they did have was from the 1950's. In terms of "chemicals", most of what I had was show-and-tell quality metals, two types of salt (mostly store-bought), and only very dilute hydrochloric and sulfuric acids. There were some other things that were old and/or no longer permitted on the premises that had to be thrown away as well. The few chemicals we had were also stored illegally, and thus, entering the chemical stockroom required that I breathe in acidic fumes until they finally fixed the neglected ventilation in that room.

Upon bringing these issues to the attention of my principal I was shrugged off. When I insisted that these safety issues were important and that I would not be held accountable for the danger the students and myself were put in, it slowly turned to open hostility. My first evaluation that year went ok. Incidentally, the school district was using a new method for evaluating teachers and dismissing teachers upon the basis of those reviews. After my insistence that something be done about the safety issues and the lack of supplies in the science laboratories, my evaluations suddenly were not as good. Each of these failed evaluations came with minimal supporting evidence against me, while all

the issues I was trying to address were shrugged off or ignored. It was soon clear that the principal was going to take care of himself by eliminating me. So, I went up the ladder.

I spoke to those I knew at the district office and who I thought would help or get me to the right people: The science coordinator in the district, the curriculum materials go-to, and the safety coordinator for the district. I was met with promises of future safety corrections, but got none until the year was nearly over at which time only one of the many issues was resolved. All the while, I continued to get bullied more and more often by the principal, a principal who saw more staff turnover than is reasonable for any workplace.

In my second year the bullying become more open. I was verbally abused in a staff meeting and then shouted down in true authoritarian fashion when I tried to defend myself. Immediately following this very public verbal abuse, I was followed to my classroom and verbally and emotionally abused again. The principal left, only to come back within 5 minutes to resume his tirade. I reported this to the district office and the union. No disciplinary action was taken. The teacher's union tried to help me both in terms of the abuse I was receiving and the twisted evaluations I was getting, but the union unfortunately cannot enforce anything. So although the council was helpful, the only thing that changed within the situation was that they were now abusing me in front of the union as well.

Needless to say, I was forced to resign my teaching position at the end of that year. One of the conditions of my resignation, however, was that I was to be allowed to continue teaching in the district the next fall as a substitute. A week into subbing at the outset of the new school year, they suspended my account, waited three days to call me in for a meeting (which I had to call about 13 times to set up), told me unceremoniously a fabricated story about things I had supposedly done/said, then told I was fired and to "get out".

I have been unemployed now for some time, and although I have applied for positions to meet the requirements for unemployment benefits, I am as scared of being hired as I am of remaining unemployed. I cannot emotionally handle the idea of returning to teaching. Other jobs seem palatable, but barely. The result, put simply, is that I'm depressed and anxious at the thought of even applying for jobs, but I am forced to do so anyway. I have worked 5 jobs in Oregon and 4 of them have been unhealthy and abusive to varying degrees. The only job I did not experience abuse by my employers was also the only part-time job I've had (which was when I was 16 and younger.)

I believe it is time the Oregon Legislature took a stand against workplace bullying and protected whistleblowers from retribution. It's time to make Oregon workplaces physically as well as mentally safe places. Thank you for hearing my story.