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RE: Support for HB 2180 and HB 2181

To: House Committee on Business and Labor

Dear Chairman Holvey and members of the Committee

As a volunteer attorney working with VOZ Worker Rights Education Project's wage recovery team over the last four years, I am confronted every week with claims of day workers who have worked for a day, a week, sometimes several months, without receiving their wages, and with the enormous difficulty that faces them, and the wage theft recovery team, in recovering those wages.

Many of the workers who make claims through the wage theft recovery program obtain judgments: through the Bureau of Labor and Industry, the CCCB, the Court of Small Claims, and district court. But these judgments too often fail to result in compensation to the unpaid worker. It is easy for an employer to transfer assets, to change the name of the corporation, to avoid the obligation. In past years, the VOZ wage theft recovery team has generally recovered more than 50%, but much less than 100%, of the wage claims which it has pursued on behalf of unpaid workers. The passage of HB 2180 will help to increase the amount of recovery for workers who have not been paid for their labor.

At VOZ there are currently open cases involving workers afraid to bring their claims for unpaid wages because they fear retaliation from their employers. One worker among several working for the same employer may be brave enough to come forward, while the others fear the exposure that making a demand could bring. Example: one of several workers working in an agricultural harvesting and packing operation in Washington County in the Fall of 2016 made a claim for unpaid wages, and in doing so described working conditions in which supervisors openly carried guns, routinely yelled profanities and sometimes struck workers, and created an environment of fear. We were able to recover this man's wages, but several other workers whom he named were afraid to press their claims. Again, In Multnomah County, two workers were employed in November, 2016, by a landscaping company. One has made a claim for 168 hours of unpaid wages; the other has expressed fear of retaliation and has not come forward to make a claim. After the employer was contacted, acknowledged his obligation, and agreed to pay "when he is able", he disconnected his telephone. One of these employees may eventually recover, the other, fearful of presenting a claim, may never do so

It is true that none of the workers described were fired from their jobs. Rather, they worked without pay, and some of them, fearing retaliation, have simply accepted this exploitation. The passage of HB 2181 will help to create an environment in which workers who have been denied their wages will feel safe to bring their justifiable claims.

I urge the Chairman and members of the committee to approve both HB 2180 and 2181 in the name for fairness for all workers in Oregon.

Respectfully yours,



John Bennett Munson