



January 29, 2018

Representative Jeff Reardon
900 Court St., NE, H-473
Salem, OR 97301

Our Mission:

To coordinate a regional workforce system that supports individual prosperity and business competitiveness.

Executive Board

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Bob Tackett
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NW Oregon Labor Council

Dear Representative Jeff Reardon,

I am writing on behalf of Worksystems, the Portland Metro Workforce Development Board to express our support for House Bill 4042, Prosperity-1000. Worksystems pursues and invests resources to improve the quality of the workforce in the City of Portland, Multnomah and Washington Counties. We develop policies and design workforce development programs and services delivered through a network of local partners to help people get the skills, training and education they need to go to work or to advance in their careers. Our partners include employers, labor groups, government, community colleges, high schools, community-based and economic development organizations.

HB 4042 offers an innovative approach to address poverty and build a scalable, sustainable model that supports individual and business prosperity across the State. Since emerging from the recession, Washington and Multnomah counties have produced over 125,000 jobs and unemployment has fallen to 3.7%. But these on-average figures obscure the reality of increasing income disparity, growing low-income employment, and rising poverty caused by structural changes in the economy.

Washington and Multnomah counties are home to the highest concentrations of poverty in the State and more than 166,000 people in the region live in poverty. Forty percent of all Oregonians of color living in poverty live in the region. More than 30,000 regional residents are unemployed and thousands work full-time but can't make ends meet because of low-wages, insufficient skills and few prospects for career and wage advancement.

At the same time, regional employers that offer high quality jobs in industries such as healthcare, construction, and manufacturing are facing a shortage of skilled workers. The net effect of this divide- unskilled regional residents struggling with insufficient, stagnating wages on the one hand, and employers grappling with a shortage of skilled workers to drive productivity and growth on the other – is a significant missed opportunity to strengthen our labor market and support our growing economy.

HB 4042 offers an opportunity to help bridge this divide and ensure all residents, and especially those living in areas of concentrated poverty, have an opportunity to fully participate in the region's economic success. HB 4042 offers a unique chance to foster a stronger and more equitable future for the region and the State, and we urge your support.

We know that you value equitable opportunities for the most vulnerable populations in our community. Your consideration and support are much appreciated.

Sincerely,


James Paulson
Chair, Portland Metro Workforce Development Board

1618 SW 1st Ave., Suite 450
Portland, OR 97201

cc: House Committee on Higher Education and Workforce Development