



February 6, 2018

Chair Riley, members of the committee:

My name is Stacy Cowan and I am with SEIU Local 503. SEIU Local 503 is the union of nearly 65,000 Oregonians doing more than 500 different jobs in 85 state, local government and non-profit agencies and care facilities. I am here today to testify in support of SB 1559.

SEIU has a history of supporting legislation that improves whistle blower protections and we are happy to do that again with SB 1559. Our members have experienced first-hand the retaliation that often comes from managers when workers expose misuse of taxpayer dollars, abuse and neglect, or outright criminal activity. SB 1559 will go a long way to prevent retaliation and give workers much needed added security when they come forward.

In recent year's workers at the Oregon Youth Authority uncovered terrible mismanagement that led to an overhaul of the agency and improved treatment for at-risk youth.

Custodial staff at the Department of Administrative Services uncovered evidence of fraudulent activity associated with a contractor who had received a sweetheart detail.

Most recently, we learned of a worker at the Oregon Department of Transportation who was fired for reporting problems with worker safety and shady contracting practices.

In each of these instances – even with the protection of a union contract – workers feared for their jobs and for other types of reprisal. It takes a tremendous amount of courage to speak out. It is a lot to ask someone to put their livelihood on the line and many times there are significant disincentives to raise concerns. The more we can improve upon existing protections, the more folks will be encouraged to speak out.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I hope you support SB 1559.

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