

June 5, 2020

To: Chair Holvey and Members of the House Committee on Business & Labor
From: Paloma Sparks, OBI
RE: Questions from OBI Testimony to HBL 5-27-2020

Chair Holvey and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on May 27 for Oregon Business & Industry. OBI is Oregon's most comprehensive business association representing approximately 1,600 businesses that employ nearly 330,000 people. We represent multiple sectors and serve as the state's Retail and Manufacturing Councils.

OBI testified to the hearing about issues related to employers' efforts to keep workplaces safe in the face of the Coronavirus crisis. We were also asked to respond to the proposal from labor about a guarantee of workers' compensation benefits for all employees currently working in workplaces. Two questions were posed from legislators about steps OBI is taking to assist employers during this crisis. Below are my responses to those questions.

Question:

Is OBI is working with businesses to help them keep their employees safe?

Answer:

Absolutely. Every day we are working with the governor's office, Oregon OSHA and OHA to get clear guidance to employers. Sadly, guidance was slow to arrive and sometime was inconsistent between agencies. We set up regular opportunities for businesses to engage with agencies to ask questions about what steps employers should be taking to keep employees safe and to make sure the steps they are taking already are appropriate. We also have hosted webinars with a variety of attorneys to provide best practices to employers. I engage regularly with Michael Wood, administrator of Oregon OSHA, to ensure we are providing the most up-to-date guidance. OBI updates resources as they are available. Employers are advised to implement safety protocols, social distancing practices, and regular health checks.

Despite the narrative presented at the hearing I can assure you business is working hard every day to keep workplaces safe. Every day I hear from employers desperate for help. We are committed to providing help wherever we can. OBI's role is to engage with policy makers to get our members the right tools to keep employees safe.

I encourage you to visit OBI's site <https://www.oregonbusinessindustry.com/> to see the various resources we have made available to businesses.

Question:

Is the state providing resources, such as PPE or financial assistance, to some businesses in order to help them keep their employees safe, or is it up to the businesses to provide these resources on their own?

Answer:

Unfortunately, direct assistance from the state has not been available. Businesses face real challenges to secure PPE. While many businesses have stepped up to produce PPE to enhance the supply chain that has largely been without the assistance of state government.

Additionally, businesses are expending massive resources not just on PPE but also on enhanced sanitization processes which often requires shutting down operations. Outside consultants are contracted with to evaluate safety procedures. Workplaces have often had to be redesigned. None of this is without cost. And all of those expenses have been placed on struggling businesses.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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