



A STRONG VOICE FOR OREGON'S WORKERS

TO: Co-Chairs Courtney and Kotek and Members of the Joint Interim Committee
on the Third 2020 Special Session

FR: Graham Trainor, President, Oregon AFL-CIO

RE: *Needs of Working Oregonians, December 2020 Special Session Testimony*

December 17, 2020

The Oregon AFL-CIO represents 300,000 workers across the state and is a voice for all workers in the legislative process. Thank you for the opportunity to provide public testimony this evening on the issues at hand in the December 2020 third special legislative session.

Oregon's Labor Movement and worker advocates have, since day one of the pandemic, advocated for greater worker protections through executive and legislative action because we know that Oregon workers, especially front line, essential workers and workers of color, are already bearing too much of the burden that this difficult year is presenting. Throughout 2020, we have fought to make sure that Oregon's workers are protected at work, that vulnerable workers can get time and treatment when they are exposed to COVID-19, and that regardless of income, every Oregon worker can make the choice to quarantine if they are sick or to take care of a loved one. We've also advocated for wrap-around and public safety net services like the eviction moratoriums, ensuring our unemployment insurance system works for all workers, and lifting up the needs of workers as we consider safely reopening our economy.

We recognize the challenges you as legislators have faced this year, including the work to make this third special session a reality. In addition to the significant investments in public health, vaccinations and wildfire support, we support the following actions before the end of the year:

- Making sure hundreds of thousands of Oregonians are not evicted from their homes during the winter surge by extending the eviction moratorium and through significant investments in tenant supports, as well as relief for high road commercial landlords.
- Extending Oregon's COVID-19 Temporary Paid Leave program to ensure low-wage workers without paid sick time or who have already exhausted their time are able to quarantine when they have been exposed to the virus. In Oregon, over 1 in 7 COVID cases stem from workplace outbreaks, the majority of which are in primarily low-income industries like retail and food

processing¹. Making sure these workers can make the choice to quarantine is an important part of the containment strategy.

- Investing in the Oregon Worker Relief Fund (OWRF) to continue to provide financial support to Oregonians who have lost their jobs yet are ineligible for Unemployment Insurance and federal stimulus relief due to their immigration status. Continued funding for the OWRF is paramount to continue helping immigrant Oregonians make ends meet during this COVID-19 crisis.

While many industries and some of the most profitable corporations have undoubtedly benefited from this pandemic, we know that many small businesses are suffering. We also appreciate steps you are taking to make sure our home-grown restaurants and industries can continue to be economic drivers within our diverse, statewide communities.

We know that working parents, especially working mothers, are facing impossible choices as the pandemic rages on and schools remain closed highlighting the need to reopen our schools safely. However, with no data to support the policy change, we have concerns with giving school districts immunity with minimal protections for school employees, parents and students to be protected as whistleblowers when unsafe behavior and conditions are occurring in schools.

While we appreciate and recognize the need and urgency for additional relief and stimulus from the federal government and we remain hopeful and engaged to ensure action occurs before workers go without unemployment insurance benefits and are pushed off benefits cliffs, we know there is more we can do as a state to protect workers.

To that end, now that the Oregon Legislature has preemptively and enthusiastically taken policy action to protect schools and businesses, we hope you can swiftly and decisively do the same to protect our retail workers, our teachers, our health care workers and first responders, and all workers across the state in the 2021 session to effectively reopen our economy and slow the spread of this disease.

While we are disappointed that more protections for workers are not on the December 2020 agenda and that more policies were not passed throughout 2020, we appreciate the work of the legislature and look forward to working with you to make sure worker safety and protections are quickly addressed in the new year.

¹ https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/e/2PACX-1vR3qMF3GAHbLEgdFJwz3i7pCR3WKPakCZuI0mhjozWTWxwTNal9vmCn_5xEXHKEf36SJeBSr_KfaPov/pubhtml