

## WFA: The Workplace Fairness Act Written Testimony Template

Date: February 12, 2019

To: Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Knopp, Members of the Senate Committee on Workforce

From: Kori Sparks

RE: Kori Sparks Support for SB 726, The Oregon Workplace Fairness Act

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Knopp and members of the Senate Workforce Committee:

I support SB 726 which would better protect workers that have faced discrimination in the workplace. I know that current laws don't go far enough to protect harassment victims at work and I support SB 726 because I have faced harassment in the workplace.

I worked in the service industry for nearly 10 years as a hostess, busser, and food runner. I can attest that sexual harassment was a daily occurrence. From inappropriate comments to unwanted touching to violent assault, restaurant culture allowed the most egregious behavior at a startling frequency in the front of house (servers), back of house (cooks) as well as patrons.

I had several friends at the restaurant whose complaints of harassment were not acted on by management, and who experienced retaliation from their harassers. I personally feared retaliation for reporting as I experienced harassment from the second most senior manager in the restaurant group who would rub my shoulders while I was folding napkins at the beginning of every shift.

Another time, I was at a party with coworkers and had laid down on the couch away from the crowd. A chef who regularly jeered at me from the line sat on the couch next to me, started crawling on top of me, grabbing me and trying to kiss me. I yelled at him to get off but he persisted until I kicked him in the sternum. He climbed back up and began grabbing me again and this time I kicked him in the neck. While this was going on, I saw the restaurant manager looking in from outside and he did nothing to intervene even as I was yelling for help. This chef was not fired and received no punishment. I had to work with him and endure retaliation including throwing towels in my face and berating me in front of other staff and even supervisors.

By making employers personally responsible for not addressing this kind of behavior, the Oregon Workplace Fairness Act would mean workers like me could keep their jobs without having to face their harasser every day. Workers have a right to safety in the workplace and I hope that we will take this opportunity to do right by the folks who keep our society running.

When you have to go to work and face abuse, it takes away the dignity and respect that we all have the right to feel in the workplace but also takes away the dignity in supporting yourself. I simply wanted to go to work and not face harassment, so that I could put food on the table and live my life without fear.

I respectfully request the committee support SB 726 and commends Sen. Taylor and the committee for giving this legislation due consideration in service to your constituencies and Oregonians from across the state. Furthermore, I commend Vice Chair Knopp for his leadership on this issue. This bill is critical to the workplace safety of all Oregonians.