

WFA: The Workplace Fairness Act Written Testimony Template

Date: February 11, 2019

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

From: Anonymous Victim 6

RE: Anonymous Victim 6 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.

I was an intern at a local nonprofit and 21 years old when I began to experience workplace sexual harassment by the executive director at the time. Throughout my internship, he would make sexual comments to me about other women and inappropriate jokes. On most occasions when we traveled for work, he only reserved one room, making us sleep in the same room even though I felt uncomfortable. I tried to look past it, but then an incident occurred towards the end of my internship. We were both at a conference, staying in the conference hotel in separate rooms, when he knocked on my door and came in to my room. My roommate was gone, and I was alone. He made inappropriate and unwanted physical gestures to me, touched me on my breast, and when I asked him to leave, he tried to kiss me. I had to push him out of the room and lock the door. The next morning, he was gone and we never had a chance to talk about it.

I was extremely embarrassed and hid the incident, telling no one. I didn't know what to do, I had never had to handle a workplace situation like this being new to the workplace. I thought I was alone in this experience. When I saw him again months later, he acted as if nothing happened. The harassment stopped, so I figured the problem was solved. I just wanted to move past it. It wasn't until 5 years later that an employee from the same organization approached me about their personal experience of sexual harassment with the same executive director. It turns out I was not the only one, that he didn't stop harassment, and they were not the only one, In total, we knew of 6 women who had experienced the same problem from the same person. All were too scared to speak out and tried to move on from the situation.

I was shocked and horrified that because I didn't say something earlier, this person was able to continue to harm other people while maintaining his position of power. I approached the board president of this organization, and four women filed complaints.

The executive director was fired immediately. It's tragic that it took that much time and suffering of so many women for it finally get to that point. We didn't have the knowledge, resources, or support we needed to come forward quicker. This was also before the Me Too movement, and it felt much more socially risky to share this type of experience.

Through that complaint process, and then sharing with others about what happened, I have experienced people not believing me, shrugging it off thinking it was nothing because I wasn't assaulted, or blaming me for not saying something or taking legal action. I'm excited to see this piece of legislation. Not only is it good policy, but it validates that sexual harassment is wrong, that people must be held accountable, and that victims are to be taken seriously. It also gives support for workplaces by providing guidance around policies and procedures that should be in place. This is critical as so many small organizations and business don't have the legal and HR resources to formulate a strong policy on their own.

Workplace harassment affected every aspect of my life because I was relying on this job to support myself (and my family). 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.