

**Testimony of Bob Bussel**  
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**Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education**

**April 17, 2019**

Good morning Co-Chairs Frederick and McClain and Members of the Committee.

My name is Bob Bussel. I am a professor of history and director of the Labor Education and Research Center (LERC) at the University of Oregon. I have held this post since 2002.

For over 40 years, LERC has functioned as the premier institution in Oregon that integrates education, research, and public service on behalf of working Oregonians. No other educational institution in Oregon provides a similar service to the state's workers and unions. We see our work as an integral part of the university's obligation to improve the quality of life for the people of Oregon.

Here's a snapshot of our work in just the past six weeks that conveys the broad scope of LERC's activities.

Our faculty have taught nurses and teachers about leadership and communications skills and electrical workers and maritime workers about conflict resolution. This past weekend, we hosted the second segment of an intensive six-month program that allows local unionists to develop their representational and leadership skills. Two of our faculty members just released a report examining the impact of unions on living standards and the Oregon economy. Later today, I will be showing a film we have made documenting how collective bargaining has transformed the lives of home health care workers and improved the quality of care for recipients

of their services. All of this in the past six weeks! These efforts attest to LERC's long and continuing record of productive public service to the state of Oregon.

LERC faculty provide accessible and relevant educational programming that helps prepare workers to become effective advocates in both their workplaces and communities. Over the past five years, nearly 10,000 people have attended our educational and training programs. More recently, we have expanded our commitment to provide lifelong learning opportunities through new offerings covering leadership development, strategic planning, organizational change, and equity and inclusion. We are especially proud of helping to educate generations of Oregon's union leaders in the practice of positive labor relations. Indeed, many of our students have gone on to hold top positions in their organizations and to serve effectively in other leadership roles as well.

Our faculty conduct applied and scholarly research on issues related to work and employment, producing new knowledge that can be used to make workplaces more safe, efficient, and productive. Our reports on the low-wage economy, fair scheduling, and the care economy have won widespread praise from policy makers for drawing attention to some of the state's major challenges. Other stakeholders have cited our research on immigration, education policy, apprenticeship, the contracting of public services, and occupational safety and health for supporting their efforts to improve the quality of jobs and raise living standards.

LERC also assists its multiple stakeholders by providing extensive consultative and technical assistance. Our faculty serve on the boards and committees of nonprofit organizations and agencies and help our diverse constituents to think creatively and effectively about the rapidly changing world of work. Our service activities have included work with the Oregon

Workforce Investment Board, the Oregon Young Employee Safety Program, the Integration Network for Immigrants in Lane County, and Oregon Tradeswomen. We worked with constituents in the city of Portland some years ago to help create a center for day laborers and also served on a sustainable business task force in the City of Eugene. For the last three decades, LERC has coordinated the biennial Public Employment Relations Conference. This popular event attracts several hundred management and union practitioners and explores new ways to enhance positive labor relations in the public sector.

I like to call LERC “the little program that could.” Our six-person faculty is small but its reach is extensive. Through our many collaborations and partnerships, we create a multiplier effect that amplifies the impact of our work.

We have long functioned on a current service level budget and appreciate the consistent support provided by the legislature. However, I must note that a week ago, the University of Oregon announced plans to make a disproportionate cut in the portion of LERC’s budget for which it is responsible. We are discussing this proposal with the university; this development underscores the critical importance of maintaining the state public program allocation that you provide.

Let me close on a brief personal note. I come from a family of modest means. I would not be appearing before you today without access to the services provided by public institutions: public schools, public libraries, public museums, public universities, and even public recreation on the municipal golf course, so my loyalty to public institutions runs deep. I am proud to be associated with an institution like LERC that provides working people with opportunities to develop their potential both as workers and citizens. We appreciate your long history of support

and look forward to the next forty years of continuing our service to working Oregonians and their communities.