

Chair Williamson, Vice Chair Gorsek, Vice Chair Sprenger, and members of the House Committee on Judiciary:

I come to you today in support of SB 726 which would better protect workers that have faced discrimination in the workplace. We know that current laws don't go far enough to protect harassment victims at work, and I support SB 726 because I experienced harassment in the workplace. SB 726 would address barriers I faced by extending the statute of limitations and providing model discrimination and harassment policies for employers.

I was sexually harassed by my boss and Executive Director while I was an intern and later employee of a small nonprofit here in Oregon. As a 21 year old intern, I was thrilled to be getting first-hand experience working for an organization dedicated to social change. Though I was a relatively inexperienced worker, I soon noticed a pattern of uncomfortable behavior by my supervisor. One instance stands out in my mind. During a one-on-one planning meeting, my supervisor he told me that he fantasized about having sex with me and then attempted to kiss me.

I was upset, embarrassed, and hurt by his actions. I was 21; he was my supervisor and at the time I did not want to jeopardize my internship and future employment opportunities with the organization. I told him not to speak to me like that again, but I did not tell anyone at the organization about the experience.

A few months later I was offered a position as an employee. I was hesitant to take the job, as my sexual harasser was still the Executive Director. But I wanted the experience and the chance to make change, so I accepted the job and said nothing.

In my time as a staff member, he continued to make sexual jokes and comments about my dating life and appearance around other staff members. Though I did not tell anyone about my experience, staff members and employees of other organizations knew about my supervisor's behavior. Fellow staff members would often text to ask if I had gotten home OK after receiving a ride from the Executive Director, and would make sure that no female staff member had to travel alone with him.

The Executive Director had created an environment where the only option to avoid harassment was to leave, so after a year and a half, I found a new job. The organization did not have a code of conduct that outlined how to address discrimination or sexual harassment in the workplace, or a process that would protect employees from retaliation.

Well over a year after the sexual harassment had occurred, a group of current and former employees and volunteers formally notified the board of multiple documented incidents of sexual harassment over multiple years by the ED. I waited so long time to speak up about my sexual harassment because there were no clear guidelines from my employer about who to speak to, what the process would be, and how I would be protected as a worker from retaliation.

Sexual harassment is not just bad for the victim, it is a bad for the entire workplace. I experienced how myself and others altered our workplace activities to avoid encounters with our sexual harasser, and left otherwise fulfilling jobs to escape continued harassment. More than my own experience, I am saddened and angered that my fear and failure to speak up led to other interns and employees also being subjected to harassment.

SB 726 offers the chance for employees to be safe on the job and hold employers responsible for harassment and discrimination in the workplace. Specifically, the individual liability piece of this bill would have served as a deterrent to this type of behavior. I respectfully request the committee support SB 726. I commend Chair Williamson and the committee for giving this legislation due consideration in service to your constituencies and Oregonians from across the state. This bill is critical to the workplace safety of all Oregonians.