



## AFSCME Urges your support of SB 726A – The Workplace Fairness Act

Dear Chair Williamson, Vice Chairs Gorsek and Sprenger and members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you, for this opportunity to provide testimony in support for SB 726A, the Workforce Fairness Act. Oregon AFSCME Council 75 represents around 27,000 members statewide in both the private and public sectors. As a business and an organization that represents employees, we support SB 726A because we believe our employees at the Council, the members we represent and all workers, deserve the protections provided in the bill.

It is every employer's responsibility to create a work environment that allows all who work and come to do business in that space feel safe. To do this everybody in that workplace needs to understand what the expectations are and that folks are held accountable to those expectations. This isn't always about a punitive approach but rather meeting an employee where they are and even coming forward to ask for what they would like to have happen. Most of the time, the desired outcome is simply to have the harassment stop.

For too long, even coming forward to ask for unwelcome advances, inappropriate touching and other forms of harassment to stop has put, mostly, women in a position of being afraid because standing up for themselves would mean losing their job. It is especially daunting when an employee is considering this fear when weighing the decision to go to their HR department or boss. They know that there will be an investigation, and will likely open themselves up to public ridicule, more trauma and potential hardship – economic and health.

Our members experiencing harassment in the workplace want to be able to talk with someone they trust to understand what the process is for coming forward, and their shop steward or other union representative can be this person and often is. We can walk them through the steps of talking with a co-worker about stopping their unwanted behavior. If it is behavior that has gone on for a long time, they may want to know what their recourse is and what the process will look like. As their representatives, we will sit down to explain it to them and support them through that process.

This applies to when a member brings forth a complaint about another member. We represent & support both members in the process to ensure that all understand the process and are fairly represented. This hasn't historically been the case. Traditionally, the accused had been represented by the union, but as AFSCME & other union strive to provide for the best possible work environments, we are figuring out best practices and supports for both parties. However, if an investigation concludes and if we find there are facts that support the accuser, the Council will not continue to spend resources to represent the accused and our Duty of Fair Representation ends. We do not want to fight to put back into place the perpetrator of abuse and harassment and further traumatize the victim.

SB 726 A gives us the opportunity to collectively work to make our work spaces safer, more welcoming and more inclusive by requiring employers to have and provide policies on harassment and



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discrimination, ending the practice of non-disclosure and no-rehire agreements when someone has experienced harassment or discrimination. All of the provisions set forth in the bill set the expectations of employers and move our society toward those expectations.

Please pass SB 726 A.

Respectfully submitted by Eva Rippeteau, political coordinator, Oregon AFSCME Council 75