



Tom Chamberlain, *President*
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TO: Chair Burdick
Vice-Chair Baertschiger
Members of the Senate Committee on Rules

FR: Jess Giannettino Villatoro, Political Director, Oregon AFL-CIO

RE: Oregon AFL-CIO Support for SB 455

The Oregon AFL-CIO represents over 300,000 working people across Oregon and is a voice for all workers in the legislative process. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 455.

Since 1985, the average age of construction workers has steadily increased from 36 years to 42.6 years. According to the Oregon Employment Department, nearly a quarter of construction workers in the state are currently age 55 or over. Oregon will see this trend continue as baby boomers retire and we will be faced with a shortage of workers to build our state¹. This is in part what makes access to quality apprenticeship programs and career/technical education (CTE) vital for our state.

While there have been major investments in CTE at the high school level, there are long waiting lists for the apprenticeship programs because the number of apprentices that the building trades can hire is totally dependent on the available work. The high quality programs that are offered in Oregon come with strict requirements related to the number of classroom and on-the-job hours that each apprentice must complete. While not wanting to dilute the quality of the programs, it is apparent that to deal with an aging workforce, that more apprentices must be brought in to each cohort. It is vital that there are more projects available to provide training hours for more apprentices, which is what SB 455 is aiming to remedy.

Currently, construction companies that bid on projects at institutions of higher education are required to show that they operate responsibly by proving that they are licensed, bonded, and insured as well as tax and workers comp compliant. SB 455 would add a pre-qualification portion to the application process on projects valued at \$8 million dollars or more, that would require the bidding contractor to be a registered "Training Agent" with the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industry (BOLI).

Apprentice programs are needed to ensure a safe and reliant workforce of young workers. SB 455 would create more opportunities for women and people of color who are seeking

¹<https://www.bizjournals.com/portland/news/2018/09/06/how-oregon-works-fresh-solutions-for-construction.html>



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employment in the trades. Training Agents are under strict requirements to work to recruit traditionally underrepresented communities in the building trades. This opportunity has given some individuals the chance to be the first in their family to move out of generational poverty and achieve financial stability.

The Oregon Department of Transportation and BOLI have already partnered in a similar statewide program to recruit and train a diverse workforce for highway construction jobs. Since the implementation of The Highway Construction Workforce Development Project, the state has seen a nearly 10% increase in people of color in building trade apprentice programs².

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 455. This is a needed change to allow for more building trade apprentices in Oregon. I strongly urge your aye vote.

²<https://www.pdx.edu/sociology/sites/www.pdx.edu.sociology/files/Wilkinson%20and%20Kelly%202018%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>