

House Committee on Business & Labor
Testimony in Support of HB 4076:
Workplace Age Discrimination Task Force
Andrea Meyer, Director of Government Relations

February 3, 2020

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With 510,000 members in Oregon, AARP works to strengthen communities and advocates for what matters most to families with a focus on health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment.

One of the most common phone calls the AARP Oregon state office in Clackamas receives is from a member who feels they have been discriminated against either in their job or in their effort to find a job. To learn more, in the fall of 2018 AARP conducted a survey of 1,000 Oregon residents age 40 or older who are working or looking for work. We discovered that ageism in the workplace occurs every day across our state, and it is tolerated or unrecognized for what it truly is: discrimination, plain and simple.

Key findings of our research:

- More than three in five Oregonians ages 40+ (62%) have seen or experienced age discrimination in the workplace. Of them, about 90% believe age discrimination is very or somewhat common.
- Age-related comments top the list.
- Older workers in Oregon are being asked for age-related information in the job application and interview process. 62% of job seekers have been asked for this information on an application and a third of those who have made it to the interview process were asked for age-related information.
- While over 60% say they would report age discrimination if they experienced it in the next year, the reality is that official reporting of age discrimination is low at 8%. This is due mainly to fear (they would lose their job or make their situation worse) and pessimism (it wouldn't do any good).

When older Oregonians have difficulties finding and keeping employment based on age discrimination, they lose the ability to provide for their families and to save for retirement. Nearly one-third of U.S. households headed by someone age 55 or older have no retirement

savings or pension, meaning they'll have to continue working or rely solely on Social Security to survive.

As one of the best-educated populations in history, today's older adults represent a wealth of human and social capital. They offer deep career experience, unmatched personal networks, and the desire to stay engaged. Oregon public policy should foster economic opportunities for older adults along with all other residents.

HB 4076 is an important next step for this critical conversation. It establishes a task force on age discrimination that will 1) identify and evaluate the impacts of age discrimination in the workplace; and 2) establish policy recommendations, including recommendations for legislation to deter age discrimination and ensure that employees of all ages have full and equal access to opportunities in the workplace. The task force, consisting of 11 members, includes an equal representation from advocates, older workers, employers and business and will report back to this committee in September 2020.

With over 50 bi-partisan co-sponsors to HB 4076 and multiple organizations endorsing, AARP Oregon is pleased to be part of this effort to advance this important issue. We urge passage of HB 4076.