



Smart policies for today's families.

DA: March 10, 2021

TO: Joint Subcommittee on Transportation & Economic Development

RE: HB 5015 - BOLI Budget

Co-Chairs Beyer and Gomberg, and Members of the Joint Subcommittee:

Family Forward Oregon is committed to advancing policies that support mothers and caregivers and help them to achieve economic stability, for themselves and for the families who rely on them. In recent years, we have supported the passage of paid sick time, the Workplace Fairness Act, and important protections and workplace accommodations for pregnant and breastfeeding workers in Oregon. However, over the past few decades, the state agency charged with enforcing these important labor protections has experienced a steady decline in funding and resources and the same time that this legislative body has focused, rightly, on expanding workplace protections to some of the state's workers who are struggling most. Expanding rights under law is important, but the outreach and enforcement work we rely on BOLI to provide is also essential in order for Oregonians to *exercise* those rights

BOLI is a critical partner in helping employers to understand and implement the important workplace protections that this legislative body works to pass. This is critical, especially for smaller employers who may lack sufficient staff to navigate a changing legal landscape and who may need more agency support. The agency must also have an adequate budget to grow the case-specific guidance and support they need to be able to provide to employees trying to understand and exercise their rights. BOLI serves as a pathway to justice for workers whose rights have been violated.

One example of BOLI's importance to Oregon workers arises in cases of wage theft. In Oregon alone, wage theft claims submitted by workers between '06 and '19 amounted to more than \$50 million.<sup>1</sup> Workers most acutely affected by wage theft are more likely to be women, immigrants, and BIPOC workers who are more likely to be tracked into low-wage, and labor intensive industries. Every worker deserves to be paid for a fair day's work and have their rights protected no matter where they work, who they are, what kind of work they do, or how much they make. And yet, those workers who are paid the least will also struggle most to access pathways to seek private remedy for labor violations, leaving BOLI as their only recourse in righting violations against them. The Governor's Recommended Budget includes added capacity for both the Wage & Hour and Civil Rights Divisions, including the addition of a

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ocpp.org/2021/01/20/lack-true-penalties-exacerbates-wage-theft-oregon/#\\_ednref4](https://www.ocpp.org/2021/01/20/lack-true-penalties-exacerbates-wage-theft-oregon/#_ednref4)

bilingual investigator--a critical step towards ensuring our state government is accessible to all Oregonians.

Workers who are prevented from accessing their right to breaks, paid time off, and a safe workplace, or who are discriminated against at work, have to overcome fear and risk retaliation to come forward. We must ensure that BOLI has the resources and capacity to sufficiently support these workers in understanding their rights, to navigate a complaint process, to enforce our laws and ultimately ensure more Oregonians can access the rights afforded under state law. Family Forward Oregon supports the allocation in the Governor's Recommended Budget to BOLI and we urge this committee's support.

Sincerely,

Courtney Helstein  
Political Director, Family Forward Oregon