



**KHANH PHAM**  
**STATE REPRESENTATIVE**  
DISTRICT 46

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Testimony in Support for HB 3144**

March 10, 2021

Co-Chairs Meek and Wallan, and members of the committee,

My name is Khanh Pham, and I am the State Representative for House District 46. I'm proud to testify today in support of House Bill 3144.

As the first Vietnamese-American legislator in Oregon, I ran for office because I believe that our democracy is stronger when our government represents the diversity of the communities it serves.

Every day I walk into the building, or even enter a virtual committee hearing, I feel both the honor and the weight of responsibility to lead in this moment of multiple crises, to fight for them and for our state.

**Legislator Pay is about producing results for Oregon families during a time that has shown just how important government is in people's lives.** In order to respond and recover from wildfires, economic recession, climate change, and a public health crisis, government intervention is needed. The issues that we legislate on do neatly conform into the 6 month window we legislate in Salem every odd year; 7 months total for every 24 months.

**Legislator Pay is about lowering barriers that exclude who can serve, and therefore who can be a voice for Oregonians and their many needs and unique experiences.**

I believe our legislature pay should be tied to how an "average" Oregonian is doing as measured by household incomes in Oregon. Our legislators cannot just skew towards those who are fortunate to have support systems that enable them to do this work; disproportionately skewed towards those who are retired, or who have passive income not tied to wages, or have wealthy family supports.

Our current pay structure is inaccessible for many people, such as young working people starting out in their career and increasingly burdened with student loans and rising housing costs or single parents with primary childcare responsibilities, who are all but shut out from our legislature. Factor in the cyclical nature of our job, when many legislators take time away from their jobs to be in Salem, it makes it very hard to find employment situations that can accommodate such a unique seasonal work schedule. That fundamentally skews the pool of people who think they can do this job.

We are a diverse state, we need a diverse legislature with many perspectives. But because of low pay, pay that can't support a family based on the number of hours it takes to do the job well,



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we are categorically screening out people who should have the opportunity to do this work and be represented in chamber.

**Legislator Pay is about racial equity for Oregonians**

People of color may make up a quarter of Oregon's population, but they represent a far lower percentage of elected officials across the state. BIPOC candidates and candidates from low income backgrounds face multiple hurdles: lack of access to donors and gatekeepers, low pay once in office and the psychological toll of public service without as many support and safety nets as others.

When voices of ordinary, working-class and BIPOC Oregonians are missing, we all suffer from the loss of policy ideas and vision...but we can change this.

**Legislator Pay is about building public trust in government, knowing our representatives are thinking about the public good, and are not distracted by conflicts of interest or their need to earn money.**

Legislators who have to keep working outside of the legislature, are more susceptible to being captured by special interest groups and lobbyists. It's not intentional, but a simple problem of capacity -- part time legislators and their limited staff often need to lean on full-time, well-paid lobbyists to carry out critical analysis and lobbying. Furthermore, we should aim to **reduce** potential conflicts of interest, real and perceived, when legislators weigh in on policies that directly affect the very industries which they're also employed within. The people of Oregon need to know whose interests legislators are working for.

I respectfully urge your support for HB 3144. Without bold action, we hold back our ability to recruit and keep the most qualified, committed and truly representative leaders to Salem to tackle big issues so that we can truly modernize the people's legislature.