

House Committee on Business and Labor
Senate Bill 169
April 28, 2021

Chair Holvey
Vice-Chairs Bonham and Grayber
Members of the Committee

My name is Martin Ramirez. I live in Eugene, Oregon. I am here to support SB 169. For over fifteen years, I worked at a company that installs windshields in automobiles and trucks. My brother-in-law worked there too. I made \$18.50 an hour at the end of my employment. I did not learn any trade secrets or know any confidential business information.

Over 10 years ago, my supervisor brought me a paper in English and told me that I had to sign it to keep working there. I signed it without understanding what it said. The contract included a noncompete agreement.

In 2019, my brother-in-law and I were frustrated that our employer would not raise our wages despite our experience. We also got a new supervisor who did not treat us well. For these reasons, we decided to start our own business. We gave notice and soon received a letter from our former employer's lawyer.

The letter told us about the agreement that we signed in 2009 and said that my former employer would enforce the noncompetition agreement. I had to find a lawyer to help me. My lawyer told me that the law allowed me to void the agreement if I sent a letter to my former employer's attorney. If I did not, she told me, the agreement would be in effect and I could be sued.

This is not fair. I have a dream of giving a better life to my five beautiful kids. I have built the skills to carry this dream out. But, my plans were delayed and slowed because I had to hire a lawyer who had to take steps to communicate with my ex-employer's attorney and void the agreement.

Employers are using noncompete agreements to scare us into not leaving. We don't know that we are allowed take our skills to another employer who will treat and pay us better or we believe that we cannot start our own businesses. The bill you are considering today would make it clear that noncompete agreements are simply not allowed to restrict someone like me -- who isn't a salaried worker, doesn't make a high wage, and definitely doesn't have access to confidential business information. Please support SB 169.

Thank you.