

Chair Holvey, Vice-Chairs Bonham and Grayber and the Members of the House Business and Labor Committee

I am Dr. Barbara Ramirez Spencer, an AAUW member, who strongly supports HB2638 to strengthen non-discrimination laws based on age.

Oregon's older workers have experienced a variety of employment practices that enable age discrimination, such as asking for age or other dates on job applications or during interviews. At a minimum, such inquiries deter older workers from applying. Moreover, many have also been subjected to ageist comments on the job. This behavior does not facilitate a welcoming or equitable workplace.

This is an issue that affects women in Oregon as the nexus between age and gender discrimination is strong. Economists at the University of California at Irvine and Tulane University found “robust evidence of age discrimination in hiring against older women.” The data show that it is harder for older women to find jobs than it is for older men.

Discrimination also exists for older women in the workplace. Age discrimination can result in older female workers being passed over for promotions, marginalized, and pushed out to make room for younger employees. Age related assumptions create the perception that older women, lack stamina, are technically behind, and want a slower pace; specifically, this results in the misconception that older women aren't invested in their careers. However, the opposite is often true. It's the employer that is no longer invested in the older female employee.

According to a Harvard Business Review article on this topic, earlier in their careers, “they (women) were subjected to assumptions about whether their family obligations interfered with their commitment to work. And when their children grew up, they raced back into the workforce, only to see their careers stalled by a reduced tolerance for aging women at work”.

A study from the National Bureau of Economic Research suggests a possible reason why older female job seekers face more age discrimination than males: age discrimination laws do less to protect older women who may suffer from both age and sex discrimination.

Oregon needs a workplace that provides equal opportunities for women of all ages. HB2818 would ensure that employers do not screen out older workers before they are interviewed and strengthen non-discrimination laws based on age. This bill has important implications for the older female workforce.

I urge you to cast an Aye vote on HB2638.