



February 22, 2021

Chair Power, Vice-Chair Wallan, and Members of the House Subcommittee on Civil Law,

Basic Rights Oregon strongly supports HB 2205 to give workers the power they need to enforce their rights at work. As members of the Fair Shot For All Coalition, we support this policy as part of the 2021 legislative agenda and our ongoing work to ensure racial, gender, and economic justice for residents in Oregon.

Basic Rights Oregon is the state's LGBTQ advocacy organization, and we are committed to supporting LGBTQ Oregonians through community outreach and legislation.

And we believe every worker deserves to be paid for a fair day's work and have their rights protected no matter where they work or how much they make.

Yet, over the past few decades, our state agencies charged with enforcing important labor protections have experienced a steady decline in funding and resources, while the size of Oregon's workforce has grown. Compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, wildfires, and an economic crisis those agencies have been overwhelmed by complaints to which they do not have the capacity to respond.

Furthermore, a lack of outreach, accessible information, and a fear of retaliation for speaking out has left Oregon's most vulnerable workers—those in agriculture, manufacturing, retail, and other low-wage industries—with little trust in the system that exists to protect them.

Specifically, wage theft has been an overwhelming concern for workers. In Oregon alone, wage theft claims submitted by workers between 2006 and 2019 amounted to more than \$50 million. It's a staggering amount that has a substantial, negative impact.

Workers most acutely affected by wage theft are more likely to be LGBTQ, womxn, immigrant, and BIPOC workers who work in low-wage and labor-intensive industries, including farm-labor, processing plants, meat packing plants, and frozen foods, as well as frontline workers in a wide range of roles. And when we add in working during a pandemic, these workers have had to contend with major concerns for their safety in the workplace.

Throughout the pandemic, our state agencies received record numbers of reports of workplace abuse and health and safety violations. During 2020, OR OSHA received complaints from 23 of the 35 largest workplace COVID outbreaks but were only able to investigate two. OR OSHA received ten times as many complaints as they do in a normal year.

The Just Enforcement Act would provide workers with a voice in their workplace and create a revenue stream for state agencies to increase enforcement capacity. Providing an avenue for workers to partner with trusted community organizations to file suits on the state's behalf would allow workers to have the community support while they speak out.

Basic Rights Oregon urges you to support HB 2205.

Thank you for your consideration,

Nancy Haque
Executive Director
Basic Rights Oregon