
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon

February 24, 2021

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

Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon is proud to be part of the Fair Shot for All coalition, a unique partnership of more than 30 community-based organizations and labor unions who came together in 2014 to advance racial, gender and economic justice in Oregon. Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon respectfully requests the committee's support of House Bill 2205, the Just Enforcement Act (JEA), which empowers workers to be able to enforce their basic workplace rights.

We stand with our reproductive justice partners who have long proclaimed that the fight for justice and equity does not end with having the right to make reproductive and sexual health decisions. A critical aspect of that work is advocating for people to have the power and resources necessary to raise and support their families in safe environments and healthy communities—that includes being paid for a fair day's work and having workers' rights protected no matter where a person works or how much they make.

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 they have no capacity to process. 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.

Workers most acutely affected by wage theft are more likely to be womxn, immigrants, and BIPOC workers who work in low-wage, and labor-intensive industries, as well as rural communities with high need for immigrant workforce, including farm-labor, processing plants, meatpacking plants, and frozen foods. Furthermore, workers who face sexual harassment or discrimination at work must overcome fear and risk retaliation to come forward. When state agencies do not have capacity to take on their cases, they are often left with no other avenues to address the harm done to them.

BIPOC and immigrant communities across our state make up a greater portion of essential and frontline workers and are most impacted by the crises of COVID, wildfires and the economic downturn. Immigrant workers disproportionately make up the workforce in industries that have seen the most widespread workplace outbreaks of COVID-19. These crises have laid bare the problems that already existed in our workplaces. Throughout the pandemic, our state agencies received record numbers of reports of workplace abuse and health and safety violations. During 2020, Oregon OSHA received complaints from 23 of the 35 largest workplace COVID outbreaks but were only able to investigate two. They also 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 who fear speaking out alone and risking their jobs to have the community at their backs while they do so. Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon urges you to support HB 2205.

Sincerely,

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Interim Executive Director
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon