



STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF HB 2205: THE JUST ENFORCEMENT ACT

**To the House Subcommittee on Civil Law
From United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555
February 24, 2021**

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

UFCW Local 555 strongly supports HB 2205 to give workers the power they need to enforce their rights at work. The Just Enforcement Act would provide workers with a voice in their workplace, ensure that existing laws are enforced, and create a revenue stream for state agencies to increase enforcement capacity. Passing the act would allow workers who currently fear speaking out alone and risking their job to partner with trusted community organizations and file suits on the state's behalf with the community at their back.

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.

UFCW Local 555 is over 25,000 workers strong in Oregon in Southwest Washington, and the largest private sector labor union in Oregon. We are a diverse group of workers who take pride in acting as a strong collective voice for working people. Our members come from a number of industries, including grocery, retail, food processing, and healthcare.

All workers deserve to be paid fairly for their labor and have their rights protected no matter where they work or how much they make. Hard-won labor protections such as minimum-wage laws uphold this right, but these rights are not worth the paper they're printed on if they're not enforced.

Oregon's state agencies charged with enforcing important labor protections are currently set up to fail. As the size of Oregon's workforce has grown, their funding and resources to protect and support these additional workers has steadily declined. 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.

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

Wage theft causes poverty. The Economic Policy Institute reported that workers in the ten most populous states suffering minimum wage violations, on average, lose \$3,300 per year and receive only \$10,500 in annual wages -- less than the \$12,760 Federal poverty rate for even a single adult with no children. Further, a 2014 study by the U.S. Department of Labor examining minimum wage violations in California and New York found that wage theft increased poverty in California by 11 percent and in New York by 32 percent. In Oregon, wage theft cost Oregon workers more than \$50 million between 2006 and 2019 alone.

Further, as an organization dedicated to equity, we must call attention to the fact that the workers taking the hardest hit from wage theft are womxn, immigrants, and BIPOC workers in low-wage, and labor intensive industries - as well as rural communities with high need for immigrant work-force, including farm-labor, processing plants, meat packing plants, and frozen foods. When these workers speak up, they often face retaliation from employers. A national survey found that Black workers were twice as likely to have experienced or witnessed retaliation for raising COVID-19 safety related concerns in their workplace, and twice as likely to have those issues remain unresolved.

BIPOC and immigrant communities across our state make up a greater portion of essential and frontline workers and are the 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. At the same time, OR OSHA received complaints from 23 of the 35 largest workplace COVID outbreaks but were only able to investigate two. This in part leads to disparities such as Latinx people making up 13% of the state's population, but experiencing more than 30% of COVID-19 infections.

The Just Enforcement Act is necessary to ensure racial, gender, and economic justice for residents in Oregon. UFCW Local 555 urges you to support HB 2205.

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UFCW Local 555