



February 24, 2021

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

On behalf of NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon, we **strongly supports passage of the Just Enforcement Act, House Bill 2205, which will 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 our 2021 legislative agenda and ongoing work to ensure racial, gender, and economic justice for residents in Oregon.

NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon is dedicated to building and sustaining a movement that uses the political process to guarantee every individual the right to make personal decisions regarding the full range of reproductive choices, including preventing unintended pregnancy, raising healthy families, and choosing legal abortion.

Economic justice and reproductive justice are intimately connected. Without economic security, families are often unable to access essential health care services like reproductive care. And when cost or other barriers prevent families from obtaining affordable reproductive health care options or the resources they need to raise and support healthy families, it is often those who are already most impacted by health and economic disparities that are forced to make decisions that may not be in the best interest or in direct conflict with their long term goals. The ability to earn fair compensation, in a safe environment, free from harassment and discrimination is at the core of economic justice and self-determination.

Over the past few decades, state agencies in Oregon who are charged with enforcing important labor protections have experienced a steady decline in funding and resources, while the size of Oregon's workforce has grown exponentially. 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.

A lack of community outreach, education programs and accessible information, has contributed to a culture of fear. Many of Oregon's most vulnerable workers – those in agriculture, manufacturing, retail, and other low-wage industries – are unaware of options they have to report unlawful practices, do not report due to real or perceived threats of retaliation, or have little trust in the systems that were created to protect them.

Enforcement of the workplace laws enacted by the legislature are not operating as intended. In claims brought to the state between 2006 and 2019, only 1% of Oregon businesses found guilty of wage theft actually ended up paying penalties imposed by the state.



Wage theft is a pervasive issue impacting every industry. In Oregon alone, wage theft claims submitted by workers between 2006 and 2019 amounted to more than \$50 million in lost income for families.

Black, Indigenous and other people of color, and (or often including) immigrant communities make up a greater portion of essential and frontline workers. They continue to be most impacted by the COVID pandemic, wildfires, extreme weather and the economic downturn, events that have laid bare the economic inequities that exist within our state. The families who have already been hit the hardest by these catastrophic events, are also navigating long-existing uncertainties and unacceptable disparities in their workplaces.

- During COVID-19, 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.
- While Latinx people make up 13% of the state's population, they have experienced more than 30% of COVID-19 infections.
- Immigrant workers disproportionately make up the workforce in industries that have seen the most widespread workplace outbreaks of COVID-19.

In 2019 NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon worked with our partners to pass SB 726, to give workers who had experienced brave enough to face to come forward access to more workplace protections. We know that employees who face sexual harassment or discrimination at work are asked to overcome incredible barriers and risk retaliation in order to come forward. When state agencies do not have capacity to take on their cases, victims are often left with no options to address the harm caused to their lives.

**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. **NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon urges your support of HB 2205.**

Sincerely,

Christel Allen  
Executive Director  
NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon