

## **Testimony of David Wourms**

### **Opposition to HB 2638**

**February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

Chair Power and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is David Wourms. I am a carpenter and had worked at my job in construction from June 2019 until my termination last spring.

Throughout my time at the company prior to COVID-19, I witnessed ongoing issues related to worker safety, particularly with the use and supply of construction personal protective equipment. Although they had access to proper PPE equipment, they did not enforce the use of it. They left it to the individual employees to find it if they wanted to use it, and even then, some may not have been available.

In the early stages of COVID-19 I made sure to educate myself by listening to guidelines from the CDC and the state. I also have family living in Europe who were dealing with the outbreak before ours to understand what they were experiencing and how they were responding. I knew the outbreak here was inevitable unless safety precautions were taken seriously.

I brought my concerns about workplace safety to my supervisors and management many times. The only noticeable action they took is a text message asking people to stay home when they were sick. However, they took no action to follow up and allowed sick employees, of which there were several, to return to work unchecked. The worksite was often overly crowded, with our team as well as several subcontractors and their crews working in proximity. No one wore masks, and were not required to do so, and there were no hand sanitizing stations. There were no efforts made to perform the work while adhering to social distancing practices, even when the nature of the work permitted it.

It seemed no one cared that we could be spreading a dangerous disease. Throughout this whole time, it was clear the main focus of the company was to complete the job by the deadline of the project and not for the safety of its' employees.

When Governor Brown came out with her new guidelines for businesses to operate under COVID-19, I immediately provided the information to the ownership and volunteered to help with workplace safety changes on site. My request was met with silence.

Given my exposure to these conditions, and my contact with people who seemed to be showing symptoms of COVID-19, and having compromised individuals in my home, I thought it would be best to self-isolate for my own protection as well as others. It was my understanding that companies were required to provide up to 40 hours of sick leave for this purpose.

Upon my request for additional sick time and sending management and ownership the requirements issued by Governor Brown, I was terminated for what the company stated were financial reasons. However, less than a week later, I was notified that the company posted it was hiring between 5-10 new employees, with a job description near identical to my own. I was not fired for financial reasons as they said.

I tell you this story, because I think you need to hear it to discuss how situations like this have become a norm with the current situation, and it is not right. I tried to do the right thing and asked the company to do more to protect its workers which shouldn't be a terminable offense, but it was, and has been for other Oregonians. I understand that businesses are dealing with new challenges, but this doesn't mean that the lives and wellbeing of employees should bear the burden and risks, alone. Please reject HB 2638 and support workers who have faced unfair retaliation.