

Testimony in Support of HB 4059

Chris Hewitt

February 7, 2021

Chair Marsh, Vice-Chairs Hudson and Brock Smith and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 4059. My name is Chris Hewitt, and I am the Political Director for the Oregon & Southern Idaho District Council of Laborers or “LIUNA” for short. We represent 4,000 construction workers in the state, many of whom work for utility contractors who build and maintain the state’s energy infrastructure, including power plants and pipelines.

The Laborers support House Bill 4059, which clarifies workforce standards and implementation of the 100% Clean Energy for All Bill (HB 2021). We very much appreciate Rep. Marsh’s leadership in convening a table that included both labor and renewable developer stakeholders in the interim months, in an effort to identify areas of shared interest and the need for certain technical fixes to aid clarity and implementation of this important law, going forward. The -3 amendment proposed today is the result of ongoing good faith collaboration between developers, environmental groups, and labor unions to better define terms under this important statute, and ensure all parties understand their responsibilities at each stage of development of an applicable wind or solar power project. The bill also expands the number of projects requiring apprenticeship utilization which increases jobs for new entrants to the renewable energy economy and further realizes HB 2021’s intent to create career opportunities for disproportionately underrepresented communities such as women, veterans, people of color, and people with disabilities.

Specifically, HB 4059 expands applicability from 10 MW to 2 MW for utility scale renewable energy projects requiring minimum apprenticeship utilization. In 2019, Oregon had 12 registered apprentices per 100 construction workers – twice that of Idaho.¹ Apprenticeship programs have the potential to democratize successful employment in the construction industry by reducing barriers to entry. Oregon community members who have never worked in construction can enroll in a free apprenticeship program, receive high-quality training from certified instructors, learn construction fundamentals and safety and health processes, and be placed on actual

¹ Lina Stepick, Ph.D. Labor Policy Research Faculty University of Oregon Labor Education and Research Center and Frank Manzo, M.P.P. Policy Director Illinois Economic Policy Institute Midwest Economic Policy Institute, “The Impact of Oregon’s Prevailing Wage Rate Law, Effects on Costs, Training, and Economic Development,” January 2021, https://faircontracting.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/FNL_Prevailing_Wage_Report.pdf.

projects where they continue to learn critical skills while earning a decent wage, and benefits. Apprenticeship programs like LIUNA's are jointly run by labor and our employer partners and provide Oregonians a debt-free pathway to a fulfilling career and the middle-class. Moreover, a vast majority of women and BIPOC construction apprentices pursuing careers in the industry are enrolled in joint-labor management programs that provide skilled career training under this model.² HB 4059 aligns the success of the state's apprenticeship programs with the vital labor demands for future renewable power projects.

Between now and 2027, there are 22 wind and solar projects totaling 3.2 GW at a cost of \$5.2 billion scheduled to come online.³ Thousands of workers will be needed to build these facilities safely. Through clarifying that covered projects will pay prevailing wages that reflect established regional construction industry standards for pay and benefits, the passage of HB 4059 will help further ensure there will be highly trained Oregonians employed to support the continued growth of this sector, going forward. Our state can achieve 100% clean energy while also providing middle-class wages, affordable family health insurance, and a decent retirement benefit for these essential workers.

The role of apprenticeship and prevailing wages in the construction industry has transformed lives – enabling shared economic prosperity and workers to realize dreams of financial stability. HB 4059 provides further clarity around minimum apprenticeship training and prevailing wages standards on wind and solar projects, which will help aid in supporting inclusive career pathways and a fair renewable energy transition for workers in our state. Now, more than ever, workers need quality job opportunities that enable them to upgrade their skills and contribute to economic activity in our expanding clean energy sector.

LIUNA urges your support for House Bill 4059.

Sincerely,

Chris Hewitt

Oregon & Southern Idaho District Council of Laborers

² Ibid.

³ Power Plant Database, S&P Capital IQ, <https://www.capitaliq.spglobal.com/web/client?auth=inherit#news/home>, accessed February 2022.