



Service Employees International Union Local 503

72,000 public services workers, care providers, and non-profit employees in Oregon.

To: House Committee on Rules
On: February 17th, 2022
Re: House Bill 4157

Chair Smith Warner, Vice-Chairs Breese-Iverson and Fahey, and Members of the Committee,

My name is David Ramos, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of SEIU Locals 503 and 49 – who represent more than 85,000 workers in the state of Oregon from public sector employees to care providers, janitors, healthcare workers, nonprofit workers, and more -- in support of HB 4157: Cost of Living Support Payments.

HB 4157 would call on the Oregon Department of Revenue to administer one-time, tax-exempt \$600 payments via check or direct deposit to Oregonians who claimed or claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) on their 2020 income tax returns by April 1st of 2022. Using existing data, the Department of Revenue will ensure that payments are distributed quickly and efficiently – with Oregonians receiving cost of living support as early as June of 2022 – no application needed.

This means that low-income workers in our state, who are disproportionately women and people of color, can benefit from these payments without having to navigate additional barriers to getting support. It also means that we can administer these critical payments without taxpayer money being spent on administratively burdensome procedures.

We acknowledge that by establishing an eligibility criterion that requires individuals to qualify for and have claimed the EITC, some individuals with a strong need for cost-of-living assistance may be left without the support they deserve. That is why a separate budget appropriation to the Oregon Worker Relief Fund is being proposed. To allow ITIN filers to receive these direct payments, too.

When we look at a map of our state broken down by county, we find that the top 10 counties where the most tax filers claimed the EITC (and consequently would benefit from this program) are Malheur, Klamath, Jefferson, Harney, Wheeler, Josephine, Umatilla, Coos, Douglas, and Lake counties – where anywhere from 16.3-22.7% of taxpayers would receive these direct payments.

While the March revenue forecast demonstrates a strong and growing economy in our state, it also reports that inflation and the cost of living have increased enough to neutralize the positive impact of wage gains Oregonians have seen recently. As such, working individuals and families are in need of support to keep pace with inflation and pay for essential needs such as housing, food, and utilities.

It has been almost two years since the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in Oregon. When panic and uncertainty brought our state to a standstill in 2020, it was some of our state's lowest-paid workers who kept us moving forward. Many of these workers were also on the

frontlines, risking their health and safety every single day to keep our facilities clean, our children fed, and our loved ones cared for.

It's past time to pass a policy that provides working Oregonians with the pandemic support they need, especially after the critical services they have provided for over two incredibly difficult and unprecedented years for Oregon workers, families, and small businesses alike. We urge you to vote "YES" on HB 4157.

Sincerely,

David Ramos
Policy & Political Strategist
SEIU Local 503, OPEU