



A STRONG VOICE FOR OREGON'S WORKERS

TO: Chair Holvey
Vice Chairs Grayber and Bonham
Members of the House Committee on Business and Labor

FR: Jess Giannettino Villatoro, Political Director, Oregon AFL-CIO

RE: Support for SB 1585A, Workers Compensation Death Benefit Notification

Feb 21, 2022

The Oregon AFL-CIO represents 300,000 workers across the state and is a voice for all workers in the legislative process. Typically, what occurs when there is a fatality that is the result of a workplace injury or exposure is that the employer is required to notify Oregon OSHA of said death and then a process is triggered that notifies the family of their eligibility to file for workers compensation death benefits to help with initial funeral related expenses and ongoing economic support. The initial reporting is not occurring with COVID fatalities so neither is the notification of eligibility to file for benefits.

To date, 169 Oregonians have lost their lives to COVID-19 as the result of a workplace outbreak. OHA has been aggregating and publishing workplace outbreak report since June of 2020. We know this data isn't perfect. The published data only captures 5 or more cases in places of employment that have 30 or more employees. In addition, not all workplace deaths are employees.

SB 1585 merely requires OHA, DCBS and OED to enter into an intergovernmental agreement to ensure that employees' families who died as the result of a COVID-19 workplace outbreak are notified of their eligibility to file for workers compensation. This committee understands filing for workers compensation does not automatically guarantee access to the benefit - nothing about SB 1585 changes that process, it merely notifies the families of deceased workers that they can file. We know of at least one family who has suffered significant financial harm as the result of not knowing this benefit even existed.

SB 1585A comes to you with a unanimous recommendation from MLAC along with the Senate Labor and Business Committee and a 24-2 vote from the Senate floor. I'd like to thank SAIF and DCBS for working with us for over 6 months to try to ensure families knew that they could file for these benefits and OED for agreeing quickly to help.