



**Oregon House Business & Labor Committee  
Testimony in Support of HB 2800  
Jim Houser, Board Member  
February 6, 2023**

As a Board Member of the small business leadership development and advocacy organization the Main Street Alliance (with over 2500 Oregon small businesses in our network), I've seen the true, authentic small business voice and values repeated throughout Oregon.

The idea that discrimination in the workplace is wrong isn't controversial.

But when it comes to discriminating against workers based on their age, Oregon has a real problem, as has been made clear to me through employment interviews with job applicants if through no other means.

I learned from my grandfather and my father who together owned a new car dealership, auto repair shop and filling station in a small town in Ohio that there is no substitute for maintaining the trust and confidence of customers, suppliers and neighbors in the local community than with the familiarity that comes with a long-time workforce.

I've also personally seen the critical role older workers play in our economy. For 37 years my wife and I operated our auto repair business in SE Portland (which is now owned by a long-time employee and her husband). A key to our success was our experienced workforce: the average tenure of our technicians and service advisors was over 20 years. In addition to our older, more seasoned employees, we had an active internship program in partnership with Mt. Hood Community College's auto technician training program. We learned the value of mentoring student interns with workers experienced in imparting tricks of the trade that make work more efficient, less stressful, more successful with fewer mistakes, and ultimately more profitable.

Frankly, in the same way that a small business owner would not ever want their best customers to even think of going anywhere else, the same is true with

experienced staff. In the final analysis, in business as well as personal relationships, loyalty begets loyalty.

On behalf of Main Street Alliance, we believe House Bill 2800 fixes this age discrimination problem and helps level the playing field for small businesses who do the right thing. It clarifies that age discrimination should be treated the same as other forms of workplace discrimination, outlining protections in hiring, firing and treatment in the workplace. When small business customers and their communities prosper, the small businesses in those communities prosper. HB 2800 is our chance to confirm that older workers have value, are vital to our economy, and deserve the same rights, protections and respect as everyone else in the workplace.

We urge you to support HB 2800. Thank you.