

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 592

February 13, 2023

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham and members of the committee,

We thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 592. United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555 is the largest private sector labor union in Oregon, representing workers from a number of industries, including grocery, retail, food processing, manufacturing, and healthcare. We are a diverse group of workers who take pride in acting as a strong collective voice for working people.

SB 592 improves current safety and health practices with the goal to make all workplaces in Oregon safer. Currently, Oregon OSHA can assess a penalty when an injury or death occurs as a result of a serious safety and health violation like a lack of training, equipment maintenance or supervision, preventable exposure to toxins, or even lack of safety gear like harnesses or hard hats.

However, Oregon OSHA penalties for these serious violations continue to be the lowest in the nation. In 2021 the average Oregon penalty for an injury that resulted from a serious violation was just over \$600 – 5 times less than the national average. And from an inspection due to a workplace death, Oregon’s average penalty was just over \$1,000 – over 10 times less than the national OSHA penalty average.¹ These low penalties mean that the worst actors can commit multiple safety and health violations before the fine is significant enough to incentivize a change in behavior.

SB 592 also strengthens inspections – which we know are also an imperative component in making workplaces safer. SB 592 would trigger a comprehensive whole-workplace inspection if 3 or more violations occur within a year or an occupational death occurs. Currently, estimations suggest that it would take Oregon OSHA 112 years to inspect every workplace in Oregon.² SB 592 ensures that when a death has occurred, a full inspection is done, checking that here are not related or wholly separate safety and health issues that could lead to another injury or death at the same workplace.

It’s OSHA’s charge to protect workers by providing resources to employers and workers, inspecting workplaces, and rectifying employer mistakes or negligence. SB 592 improves reporting, strengthens penalties, and helps make sure that more workplaces are safe before another injury or death occurs.

Even one worker death or injury from a preventable workplace hazard is too many and ultimately hurts the economy and our communities at large. We encourage your support of SB 592

Fiona Yau-Luu,
Political Liaison,
UFCW Local 555

¹ https://afcio.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/2214_DOTJ_Final_42622_nobug.pdf

² https://afcio.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/2214_DOTJ_Final_42622_nobug.pdf