

February 15, 2023

Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Bonham, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Akash Singh and I am writing on behalf of the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), a national organization that puts science into action with the goal of contributing to an equitable, sustainable, and healthy future. UCS is proud to be supported by more than 10,000 Oregonians, including over 500 professionals who are a part of our Science Network.

I am testifying today in support of SB 592, which would improve workplace safety and health in Oregon. While UCS has traditionally worked on legislation that is explicitly about climate change and its impact on the environment, as an organization we have been working to broaden our understanding of what environmentalism means. We are proud to support this important piece of legislation and contribute to the inclusion of labor rights into environmentalism.

UCS strongly supported Oregon OSHA in adopting some of the strongest standards in the nation protecting Oregon's workforce from climate-fueled extreme heat and smoke conditions. SB 592 provides an urgent and necessary means of enforcing those standards, which are critical to ensure the health and safety of outdoor workers across Oregon.

Approximately 32 million workers across the United States are forced to make a choice between working in hazardous extreme heat and losing their jobs.¹ That is not a choice anyone should have to make. By 2050, \$39.3 to \$55.4 billion in outdoor workers' earnings would be at risk annually by 2050, which will disproportionately impact low-income workers and their families.² There is also a racial justice component to this as well, as Black and Latinx individuals comprise more than 40% of outdoor workers while they are collectively about 32% of the general population.³

¹ https://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/Too-Hot-to-Work_9-7.pdf

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SB 592 makes Oregon a safer place to work. While Oregon OSHA can levy various penalties in response to workplace safety and health violations, Oregon OSHA penalties are the lowest in the nation. The average Oregon OSHA penalty in 2021 was approximately \$600, which is five times less than the federal average. In a workplace death inspection, Oregon OSHA's average penalty was approximately \$1,000, which is more than ten times less than the federal average.

The practical consequence of such low penalties is that there is not enough of an incentive for the worst actors in business to not exploit their workers, harm their workers, and ensure that their workers have a safe environment in which to work. SB 592 corrects this by aligning Oregon OSHA penalties with federal OSHA penalties and additionally triggers a comprehensive investigation within a year of a workplace death or if three or more willful violations have occurred in a year. SB 592 also requires annual reporting to the legislature and adds another layer of accountability to keep Oregonians safe in the workplace.

One worker death or injury at a workplace is one too many. I urge you to support this legislation and help create a safe workplace for all Oregonians.

Thank you so much for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

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