



SIERRA CLUB

OREGON CHAPTER

February 15, 2023

Senate Committee on Labor and Business
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Testimony in Support of SB 592

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of SB 592 on behalf of the more than 74,000 members and supporters of the Oregon Chapter Sierra Club. SB 592 improves current safety and health practices with the goal of making 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 such as insufficient training, equipment maintenance or supervision, preventable exposure to toxins, or even lack of safety equipment such as 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. Additionally, in an inspection due to a workplace death, Oregon's average penalty was only slightly above \$1,000 – over 10 times less than the national OSHA penalty average. These subpar penalties thus create the potential for our worst violators to continually commit multiple safety and health violations before the fine is significant enough to incentivize a change in behavior.

SB 592 strengthens inspections – which are an imperative component in making Oregon 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. SB 592 ensures that when a death has occurred, a full inspection is done, checking that there are not related or wholly separate safety and health issues that could lead to another injury or death at the same workplace.

Unfortunately, we know that injuries and deaths take place across every industry in Oregon; however, for some industries there is always a present danger. It is OSHA's charge to protect workers by providing resources to both employers and employees, inspecting workplaces, and rectifying employer mistakes or negligence. SB 592 improves reporting, strengthens penalties, and helps make sure that Oregon has safe workplaces and avoids any needless injury or death.

As you work, reading this letter in the comfort of your office or home, please consider that not all Oregonians have the luxuries afforded to many of us. I do not fear my workplace nor would I feel compelled to stay at a workplace where I felt my safety was compromised. But my privilege is not the privilege of many, and even one death or injury from a preventable workplace hazard is too many.

Did you know that workers of color have also been more disproportionately impacted by workplace hazards than white workers? The Latino fatality rate increased again, rising to 4.5 per 100,000 workers in 2020, 32% greater than the national average and marks a 15% increase over the past decade. The Black worker fatality rate of 3.5 per 100,000 workers continues to be greater than the national average.

Job injuries have long term financial impacts on families. Following receipt of workers' compensation benefits, injured workers' incomes are, on average, nearly \$31,000 lower over 10 years than if they had not suffered an injury. Think of the impact to taxes with that average multiplied across the state.

Job injuries and deaths also have long-term impacts on our economy. Businesses pay between \$176 billion and \$352 billion annually in direct and indirect (overtime, training and lost productivity) costs on workers' compensation losses for the most disabling injuries. Preventing injuries and deaths saves significant costs long term.

Loss of life, workplace shutdowns, and lost tax revenue ultimately hurt the economy of Oregon and our communities. We are counting on you to support SB 592 and make workplaces throughout all of Oregon as safe as possible.

Thank you,

Elizabeth Dix
Chair, Legislative Committee
Oregon Chapter Sierra Club