
Testimony: 2023 OREGON SB 85 I: PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE IN THE WORKPLACE

March 14, 2023

I am offering testimony on SB85 I on Psychological Abuse in the workplace

“SEE A BULLY, STOP A BULLY, MAKE A DIFFERENCE” inscribed on a wristband for students in the k12 system. For years I held on to that purple band with the hope for meaningful legislation to deal with the elephant in the workplace - the psychological abuse from bullying I suffered that impacted my health, when I wrote the following to describe my experience in 2000:

“My concentration and focus on my work and responsibilities have suffered in the last months and this has impacted the level and quality of work I produce...I come away from each of our meetings (with my supervisor) increasingly feeling afraid, intimidated, and demoralized...It is difficult to openly express fear. Fear makes you lonely, and alone. You recognize it, you feel it; it consumes you; it knots you inside. Fear paralyzes your senses, your whole being. It attacks your immune system; it makes you feel nauseous and ill, your nerves are on edge and pinch. It ruins your concentration, your focus, your attention -usurping your senses, your muscles tighten taut. It is an uncomfortable feeling. It is not a feeling you are willing to openly discuss with your fellow colleagues when you are isolate in your circumstance.”

I am Theodora Ko Thompson. Workplace Bullying Survivor. And a #MeToo survivor. I almost left the University of Oregon from that first bullying experience when I wrote to describe what I experienced in the one-on-one meetings with my supervisor, behind closed doors of her office. I was the most senior evaluator in my unit. For the six months with the new supervisor I experienced my pride and self-dignity being violated. In my supervisor’s eyes, that I had the benefit of being a part-time student during work hours, was an egregious violation in the workplace. I suffered in silence. My new supervisor tried to take away my access to the flex schedule I had taking classes as a part-time student since 1994 – to achieve my American Dream, to earn myself a degree. An addendum with unwarranted allegations to make me look incompetent was included to a satisfactory performance evaluation completed by another supervisor.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE from bullying impacted me greatly. Waking up in sweat from nightmares, facing each new day feeling being held hostage to an abusive boss should NEVER be experienced by any employee, nor ignored by the employer. Staying to finish my degree meant I first needed to take care of my health, and work at regaining my self-esteem and dignity. In 2020 together with my coworkers (dedicated long service female employees), I again experienced the deja-vu of psychological abuse from our male bully boss. Again, unwarranted allegations were made – this time added to my telecommute agreement.

WORKPLACE BULLYING: Let’s not sugarcoat nor continue moving the “goal post” to hold employers accountable what Bullying is about: Psychological abuse. An occupational health hazard that affects the mental wellness and psychological safety of employees. Workplace bullying is a culture of psychological abuse that speaks of a systemic occupational health hazard of abusive workplace cultures. The psychological abuse from the culture of workplace bullying is a common experience of SEIU 503 represented workers, affecting the health, social and economic livelihood of employees around the state. It is important to note

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- A 1999 report on work-related stress by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) concluded that job stress is linked to higher levels of cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders and psychological disorders, including the possible correlation of job stress that contributes to higher levels of workplace injuries, suicides, cancer, ulcers and impaired immune function.
- The 2016 EEOC Taskforce on the Study of Harassment in the workplace reports almost fully one third of the approximately 90,000 charges received by EEOC in fiscal year 2015 included an allegation of workplace harassment and that the vast majority, 72% of workplace bullies are bosses and the study found that 62% of employers ignore the bullying problem.
- Substantial research on abusive workplace behaviors by Dr Bennett J Tepper: “Abusive supervision has been linked with several manifestations of psychological distress including anxiety (Harris, Kacmar, & Boonthanum, 2005; Tepper, 2000), depression (Tepper, 2000), diminished self-efficacy (Duffy et al., 2002), burnout (Grandey et al., 2007; Grandey & Kern, 2004; Tepper, 2000; Yagil, 2006), somatic health complaints (Duffy et al., 2002; Schat, Desmarais, et al., 2006), and job strain (Harvey, Stoner, Hochwarter, & Kacmar, in press). Tepper’s research found that the effects of abusive supervision on work related attitudes were stronger among those who had less job mobility. Tepper attributed this to the notion that abused subordinates who have fewer attractive job alternatives will feel trapped and unable to escape from the source of their stress

It is critical that with legislation that there is transparency and accountability mechanisms, for example:

- The Bureau of Labor and Industries Commission (BOLI) establishes a transparent and accountable tracking and annual and/or bi-annual reporting mechanism or system of employer and employee workplace harassment incidents via formal grievances, investigations, outcomes and corrective measures.

Let’s show Oregon leading the way with a comprehensive bill that sends that same message we tell our kids: See A Bully. Stop A Bully. Make A Difference. Let’s send a clarion message that Oregon will not accept psychological abuse in the workplace.

I will be glad to provide further details of both bullying experiences.

Respectfully

Theodora Ko Thompson