



March 16, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Labor and Business  
From: Our Children Oregon, The Children's Agenda  
RE: Support for SB 907

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

The Children's Agenda, convened by Our Children Oregon, brings together ~127 organizations statewide to create a holistic legislative agenda dedicated to improving the well-being of Oregon's children, youth, and families. Our collective created a 2023 legislative agenda that focuses on community-driven solutions to provide access and opportunities for all children and families. **We write in support of the Right to Refuse Dangerous Work (SB 907), which is a top priority of the 2023 Children's Agenda.**

Rapidly accelerating changes in our climate are causing devastating and deadly wildfires, ice storms, and extreme heat across Oregon. As a result, Oregon workers are increasingly at risk of illness and death on the job. In 2021, we saw the devastating impacts of climate change due to the heat dome. Heat exhaustion injured countless workers in warehouses, restaurants, construction sites, and agricultural sites, and caused the death of three workers. According to Oregon's OSHA fatality database, there were at least 75 fatal events involving one or more workers last year.<sup>1</sup>

We must act now to provide more protection to Oregon's frontline workers. Workers should not have to choose between their income or health. Families should not have to worry whether their family member will come back home safely. This is especially important given the recent revelations nationwide of the exploitation of unaccompanied, migrant children by prominent companies.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, both adults *and* children are often put in dangerous work situations that they cannot refuse. While an Oregon OSHA rule already allows workers to refuse unsafe work, this right is very difficult to exercise, and often results in retaliation. The Oregon legislature must guarantee the "right to safe work" by making this *existing* right easier to exercise. SB 907 would:

- Allow workers to reasonably refuse to do work that can cause them death, serious impairment or serious injury— such as unsafe equipment. It does *not* give workers an unfettered right to skip work.

<sup>1</sup> <https://osha.oregon.gov/pubs/reports/Pages/fatality-initial-reports.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/25/us/unaccompanied-migrant-child-workers-exploitation.html>

- Give workers the right to leave or refuse to report to a worksite due to extreme natural disasters, active evacuations, and acts of criminal violence and terrorism such as mass shootings.
- Allow employers the opportunity to remove or fix hazardous conditions or reassign a worker to a different job, in which case the worker would not have a right to refuse.
- Allow sick time, PTO, or vacation time to be used to protect a worker's pay in situations where it is too dangerous to work.
- Protect workers from retaliation under Oregon's already-established rebuttable presumption if they exercise this right in good faith and act as a reasonable person would.

The climate is changing. We must respond accordingly and protect Oregon workers where current workplace rules fall short. We thank you for your time and efforts to improve working conditions, and thus, help support the well-being of families. We urge your support of SB 907.

Sincerely,

Our Children Oregon  
 Oregon Environmental Council  
 PCUN  
 Beyond Toxics  
 IRCO  
 Clackamas Women's Services  
 Neighborhood Partnership  
 Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries  
 Oregon CASA Network  
 Oregon Center for Public Policy  
 Oregon Food Bank

Oregon Kids Read  
 Oregon Law Center  
 Oregon Nurse Association  
 Oregon Primary Care Association  
 Oregon Resource Family Alliance  
 Oregon School-Based Health Alliance  
 Prevent Child Abuse Oregon  
 SEIU  
 Southern Oregon Success  
 Urban League of Portland  
 Willamette Partnership

*[View the 2023 Children's Agenda: www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2023-childrens-agenda/](http://www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2023-childrens-agenda/)*