

March 17, 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 writing to you today in support of SB 907.

UCS is proud to have supported efforts to address farmworker overtime and outdoor worker protections from extreme heat in previous sessions and is proud to support this effort to protect Oregonians from injuries and fatalities that occurs because of dangerous working conditions.

State rules allow workers to refuse work in unsafe and/or unsanitary conditions but it is often difficult to exercise that right because of a fear, among others, of retaliation. Data shows that workplace hazards kill approximately 125,000 workers in the U.S. - an average of 340 worker deaths each day due to hazardous working conditions.¹

Extreme weather from climate change is only exacerbating these conditions. Outdoor workers account for 20% of heat-related deaths and as Oregon experiences more heatwaves due to the exacerbating conditions of climate change, this risk will increase as well.²

SB 907 allows workers to reasonably refuse work that can cause them death, serious impairment, or serious injury - such as extreme heat or unsafe equipment. In response, an employer can either fix the dangerous condition or move workers to other jobs that are not hazardous. It would give workers the right to use PTO time to leave or refuse to report to a worksite due to extreme natural disasters, active evacuations, and acts of criminal violence such as mass shootings.

SB 907 does not create a new right or give workers an unfettered right to refuse to work. It simply takes an existing right and clarifies it in statute, making it easier to protect Oregonian workers who exercise this option from retaliation.

¹ <https://aflcio.org/reports/death-job-toll-neglect-2022#:~:text=340%20workers%20died%20each%20day,was%203.4%20per%20100%2C000%20workers.>

² <https://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/farmworkers-at-risk-report-2019-web.pdf>

I urge you to vote yes on SB 907. Oregonian workers, who are being killed at higher rates than workers in neighboring states, deserve better and the choice to not endanger themselves in order to work.³

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

Akash Singh

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³ <https://aflcio.org/reports/death-job-toll-neglect-2022#:~:text=34%20workers%20died%20each%20day,was%203.4%20per%20100%2C000%20workers.>