

DATE: March 16, 2023
FROM: Sammi Teo, Public Policy Advocate
RE: Support for SB 907, Right to Refuse Dangerous Work



Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Bonham, and members of the Senate Committee on Labor & Business,

Oregon Food Bank's mission is "to eliminate hunger and its root causes... *because no one should be hungry.*" We pursue this goal in two key ways: we foster community connections to help people access nutritious food today, and we advocate to change policies that drive hunger and poverty.

In Oregon, there are too many workplace deaths that could have been prevented.

Workers need to be safe on the job. If a worker reasonably believes a job assignment can seriously injure or kill them, they should be able to say no to such work. No one should have to choose between their livelihood and being safe while working. This basic right improves the likelihood that a job will provide a stable income— and **stable employment is a critical factor in reducing rates of poverty and food insecurity.**

However, systemic inadequacies have created a severe disparity for people who face disproportionately high burdens of injury and death because of their jobs. Data shows that workplace hazards kill approximately 125,000 workers each year in the U.S. — with [4,764 killed on the job](#), and another [120,000 from occupational diseases](#).

- **Latinx workers** are [32% more likely to die on the job](#) than the national average, and of those who died in 2020, [65% were immigrants](#).
- **Workers ages 55+** make up [one-third of workplace deaths](#).
- **Outdoor workers** account for [20% of heat-related deaths](#).

During the Summer 2020 heatwave, there were at least 254 complaints submitted to the Oregon Occupational Safety & Health Administration, and **at least 3 heat-related deaths in the 3-day heat-dome**. Knowing that extreme weather events will only increase in frequency and severity, we have a responsibility to act *now* and protect our frontline workers.

SB 907 is a common sense bill that clarifies the right to a safe workplace.

That is why Oregon Food Bank supports SB 907. While state rules allow workers to refuse unsafe work, it is currently very difficult to exercise this right, and doing so often results in retaliation. **SB 907 would allow workers to reasonably refuse to do work that can cause them death, serious impairment, or serious injury— such as extreme natural disasters, active evacuation zones (e.g., wildfire), faulty equipment, and acts of criminal violence such as mass shootings.** In response, employers can fix the condition, or reassign workers to other jobs that are not hazardous. Additionally, it would give workers the right to use PTO in exercising this right.

SB 907 does not create a new right— nor does it give an unfettered right to refuse to work. It takes an existing right that is hidden in an administrative rule, and clarifies it in statute. It would use Oregon's already-established rebuttable presumption to protect those who exercise this right from retaliation.

We urge you to help prevent workplace injuries and deaths by supporting SB 907.

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