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Public Hearing before the House Business and Labor Committee

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Testimony in support of SB 592

Chair Holvey, Vice Chairs Sosa and Elmer, members of the committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 592, which would trigger a comprehensive worksite investigation within a year of a workplace death or in the event of three or more willful violations within a year, align Oregon OSHA penalties to Federal OSHA penalties and adjust yearly to inflation, and require at least annual reporting to the legislature on the number of inspections, penalties, and appeals.

OLC's mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. Many of our clients have incomes at or below the federal poverty level, and work hard to provide the necessities for themselves and their family.

All workers deserve a safe and healthy environment. After all, folks spend a significant portion of their life at work. Unfortunately, we know that injuries and deaths take place across every industry in Oregon. Latine and black workers are disproportionately impacted by hazardous work environments that lead to injury or death.

Currently, Oregon OSHA penalties for these serious violations continue to be the lowest in the nation. These low penalties mean that the worst actors can commit multiple safety and health violations before the fine is significant enough to incentivize a change in behavior. SB 592 increases and aligns OR OSHA penalties to federal OSHA penalties and increase with inflation every year. This a step in the right direction to increase a culture of compliance.

SB 592 also strengthens inspections—which we know are also an imperative component in making workplaces safer. This bill triggers a comprehensive inspection when a fatality has occurred in the workplace, checking that here are not related or wholly separate safety and health issues that could lead to another injury or death at the same workplace. SB 592 also prompts a comprehensive workplace investigation in the event of three or more willful or repeat violations within a year.

Even one worker death or injury from a preventable workplace hazard is too many and ultimately hurts the economy and our communities at large. It is OSHA's charge to protect workers by providing resources to employers and workers, inspecting workplaces, and rectifying employer mistakes or negligence.

SB 592 improves reporting, strengthens penalties, and helps make sure that more workplaces are safe before another injury or death occurs. We urge this committee's support for SB 592.

Thank you for your consideration.