



Associated Oregon Loggers, Inc.

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April 24, 2023

The Honorable Paul Holvey, Chair
House Committee on Business and Labor
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: SB 592 A – **Oppose**

Chair Holvey, Vice Chair Elmer and Sosa and Committee Members:

Associated Oregon Loggers (AOL) is Oregon's forest operator trade association which represents nearly 1000 small contracting businesses. Our members have been involved in the management of Oregon's forests for generations and provide their local communities with economic stability, Oregon with healthy and vigorously growing forests and the nation with renewable building materials. Thank you for the opportunity to share with you the voice of nearly 22,000 hard working Oregonians who care deeply about safety on the jobsite and ensuring everyone gets home safely at the end of the day.

Creating a Safer Forestry Workforce:

AOL Services, Inc. (AOLS) is a single line insurance agency specializing in workers' compensation insurance for Oregon forest operators and associated companies. AOLS operates the workers' compensation group insurance program in partnership with SAIF for member employers of Associated Oregon Loggers, Inc. (AOL), Oregon's forest operator trade association. Our AOLS agents are safety management consultants (SMCs), who provide professional safety services to forest contractors whether or not, we are their agent of record. These critical team members educate employers and employees on practices that help create safer work environments. Our SMCs, and the many other safety professionals in the state, recognize that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

According to SAIF, this principle in-practice has led to a 52% reduction in the total number of workers' compensation claims in Oregon since 1986, despite a workforce that has grown by 79%. In 1986, Oregon was the sixth highest in the nation for loss experience and workers' compensation rates. By 2022, Oregon's SAIF workers' compensation program has achieved the tenth lowest rate. Disabling claims have dropped by over 50% and the fatality rate has plummeted by 70%. Since 1991, the SAIF partnership with Associated Oregon Loggers has resulted in EVERY worker's compensation class code we serve realizing at least a two-thirds reduction in premium.

This significant drop has been accomplished through effective programs of preventative and proactive safety education and safety services to employers. As the profession of logging and other forest operations has gotten safer through employer and insurer efforts, it has become significantly less hazardous for workers and more rewarding for employers to provide safe work practices.

Continued Opposition to SB 592 A:

We believe the changes made to SB 592A in the Senate Labor Committee to refine section 1 of the measure to adjust the process for investigating workplace deaths is an improvement. However, the current process for workplace fatality investigations is already burdensome on the employee's family and the employer. Investigations can take months to finalize and family members are given little to no information about the accident until the investigation has been completed. By increasing the process and extending the investigation beyond current law, grieving families will have to wait even longer for answers, forcing these loved ones, friends and colleagues to endure significant trauma over and over again. AOL's member companies that have gone through this unfortunate

process have communicated with us that the current process is already very thorough and cannot even comprehend how or why the process would need to be drawn out longer. By putting this additional process of a comprehensive inspection following an accident investigation into statute, it changes the relationship that the field staff at OR-OSHA has when working on these issues with the grieving employer. It forces the hand of the field staff and limits the compassion and care that can be taken during such a delicate and emotionally charged situation.

Additionally, we continue to remain very concerned with the significant increase in OR-OSHA fining authority created in section 2 of the bill. We believe this level of potential fine will adversely impact the productive relationship Oregon employers currently have with OR-OSHA where cooperation and coordination in the pursuit of safer and better outcomes for our employees is a shared objective. We believe these increased fines will have a disproportionate impact on Oregon's smallest businesses, like the ones that AOL and AOLS serve. Small and family-owned businesses often do not have the resources to absorb the high penalty exposure created by SB 592A.

Furthermore, we anticipate the bill's proposed efforts would substitute counter-productive penalty measures for the OR-OSHA staff's current important focus and resources to achieve other more meaningful prevention and education safety objectives. We have confidence that educational opportunities for the most up-to-date safety information and practices, technical assistance in navigating the complicated regulatory field, incentives for exemplary safety cultures along with grants for investments in safer machines, equipment and materials can have a more consequential impact in creating safer work, healthy worksites and preventative employer cultures.

Associated Oregon Loggers and our Services subsidiary are absolutely committed to increasing safe performance of our member employers and employee safety. Safety is at our core. We cannot complete our work without safe and healthy employees, and caring for them like family is the rule, not the exception.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on our views and opposition of SB 592A.

Graciously,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amanda Sullivan-Astor', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Amanda Sullivan-Astor (she/her/hers)

AOL, Forest Policy Manager

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