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April 26th, 2023

Chair Taylor, Members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Business
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Andrea Valderrama
State Representative, House District 47
900 Court St. NE, H-286
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Testimony In Support of HB 2057: Ending Wage Theft

Chair Taylor and members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Business,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to you this morning in support of HB 2057. For the record my name is Andrea Valderrama and I represent House District 47.

When my family fled political persecution and violence in Peru, they left economic opportunities that compensated them for the education and experience they had. Once in the states, they were forced to start over, working daily residential jobs in painting, cleaning, and construction projects. Because this work is based on projects available and doesn't provide a stable FTE, my family was often unsure of which job or how much they'd make every day. I remember the stress this caused my family and me as an 8 or 9 year old, waiting to hear back how many jobs were worked that way. Whether we'd have enough resources for food, my asthma medications, clothes or the more important things to me like my favorite cereal or a trip to the science museum I loved so much. I remember the receipts my grandmother saved, the concerned faces and the fear of not being able to make ends meet when payments were delayed or worse, never received. Not being able to speak the language or navigate complex legal systems prevents immigrants and refugees and Black and Brown workers from recouping much needed resources. This experience categorically changed my life, and is the reason I am clear eyed when I say: economic justice is racial justice.

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When wages are stolen or unpaid, the impact is multigenerational, significant, and harmful. It disproportionately impacts Black and Brown workers because low-wage workers are most often Black and Brown. The Oregon Law Center submitted written testimony in support of this bill that states, “Wage theft robs an individual’s ability to take care of themselves and their families, and it disproportionately impacts low wage workers, women, people of color, and immigrant workers.”¹ HB 2057 addresses the income inequality and unfair labor practices that predominantly undocumented, Latinx, or immigrant and refugee workers face.

We’ve heard a bit about a potential disproportionate impact this bill may have on MWESB contractors, and I’d like to offer some responses. If a subcontractor doesn’t pay their workers and evades responsibility, it makes it extremely challenging for workers to recoup their wages because often, workers may not know who their employer actually is. If any subcontractor, minority owned or otherwise, is allowing wage theft to occur, they should be held accountable and their business practices should be questioned.

In addition, many construction workers work for a short period of time on one project and then move to another. These workers are essential skilled workers. Without them, industries such as construction would not be able to function efficiently. Unfortunately, due to the complexity in employment tiers or layers of contractors between workers and project owners has made it difficult to track if wage theft has occurred. Workers may not report wage theft because of possible fear of retaliation or worse if other factors, such as immigration status, are considered.

Wage theft has real, intergenerational consequences on Latinx families and Black and Brown communities. You have a chance before you today to offer the stability workers deserve in HB 2057. I’m proud to be a sponsor of HB 2057 and hope you join me in supporting this bill.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Andrea Valderrama". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "A" and a long, horizontal stroke at the end.

Andrea Valderrama
State Representative, HD 47 (Outer East Portland)

¹ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/61976>