

Co-Chair McLain, Vice-Chairs Boquist and Boshart Davis and members of the committee thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of funding the Interstate Bridge Replacement project. For the record, my name is Samantha Deschenes, and I am a registered apprentice with the Ironworkers Local 29.

I started in the trades 6 years ago as a non-union welder making \$14 an hour. No health benefits were offered to me that I could afford, there weren't any additional benefits for my retirement, and I was dependent on my parents to help me financially support my son. Joining the union changed my life completely. I now make a living wage, have financial stability, and possess access to quality healthcare and retirement. Being able to provide for my son independently, as a single mother, has given me so much hope for our future.

This quality of life isn't only mine to hold. We can change the standard of living for so many women and people of color who may not have had access or knowledge about union careers. Our union hall diligently reaches out to minorities to educate them on the benefits of having a lasting career in the trades. Showing them that they can belong and thrive here. If we have a project labor agreement, you will give this opportunity to so many deserving people who may not of had the chance with a non-union company. We want to teach the future generation of tradesmen by having standards of apprentice participants so they can go on to build quality infrastructure for Oregon in the future.

Being a union member not only provides diversity, but it provides vital training to complete these jobs safely and efficiently. I have comfort knowing that the people working beside me and whom I learn my trade from have the high-quality education that I'm studying now. When I was employed at non-union companies, I was given little to no training at all, while being expected to navigate my way through heavy equipment and potentially hazardous situations. There were a few near misses that could have easily been prevented if I had been given any sort of quality training. There is no measure to how important safety is. This is emphasized daily on the job site and my life is recognized as more than just a way to make a profit.

I cross this bridge daily, and to be able to look at it and tell my son "Mom built that" would be a part of my legacy. As I hear stories of past union ironworkers and the iconic work that they've done, I want this bridge to be a part of mine. As a member of Ironworkers Local 29, I look forward to this incredible opportunity of working on the 1-5 bridge replacement project. Thank you for your time and for the chance to share how this project impacts me and my community.

Sincerely,

Samantha Deschenes

Apprentice, Ironworkers Local 29