



DATE: May 10, 2023  
 FROM: Sammi Teo, Public Policy Advocate  
 TO: House Committee on Business and Labor  
 RE: Support for SB 907A, Right to Refuse Dangerous Work

Chair Holvey, Vice-Chairs Elmer and Sosa, and members of the Committee,

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 an 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](#). In the U.S.:

- Latinx workers are [32% more likely to die on the job](#), 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](#).

People working on the frontlines – including in smoke and extreme heat – face a high risk of illness and death. For example, 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 workers.

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

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 907A would clarify that workers have a protected right to reasonably refuse to do work that can cause them death or serious injury– such as extreme natural disasters, active evacuation zones, faulty equipment, and acts of criminal violence such as mass shootings.** In response, employers can fix the condition, or reassign the worker to another assignment that is not hazardous. Additionally, it would give workers the right to use PTO in exercising this right.

SB 907A 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.

Please vote ‘Yes’ on SB 907A. **Workers in Oregon are being [killed at higher rates than neighboring states](#).** We need to give workers the option to protect themselves in dangerous workplace situations. Thank you.

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