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SB 1518 – Oregon Caregiver Wage Protection Act
Senate Committee on Labor and Business | February 6, 2026

Position: FAVORABLE

The National Women's Law Center (NWLC) submits this testimony in support of SB 1518 (as amended), which would decouple Oregon's labor protections from the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) to the extent necessary to ensure that home care workers—who provide critical care to thousands of disabled people and older adults in Oregon—retain their right to minimum wage and overtime pay under Oregon's labor laws, even in the face of potential rollbacks of these protections at the federal level.

Since 1972, NWLC has fought for gender justice—in the courts, in public policy, and in our society—working across the issues that are central to the lives of women and girls. NWLC advocates for the improvement and enforcement of our nation's employment and civil rights laws, with a particular focus on the needs of LGBTQI+ people, women of color, and women with low incomes and their families. NWLC also advocates for improvements in our nation's care infrastructure, so families are better supported in caring for their children and family members, and so older adults and disabled people have the agency to determine what kind of care best meets their preferences and needs.

Home care workers are facing threats under the current administration, as the Department of Labor proposes to strip these essential workers of their basic labor protections. Oregon must act to protect its foundational labor standards from federal attacks, and to ensure that home care workers can thrive in the future.

Direct care workers provide essential care and support to disabled people and older adults as they navigate their lives through medical needs. And home care workers especially support people while they remain in their homes and within their communities, where most older adults and disabled prefer to receive care. Despite their critical role across the country, in 2025 the Department of Labor proposed rolling back decade-old basic labor protections for home care workers, suggesting that home care work is mere “companionship” and thus not entitled to a federal minimum wage and overtime pay.¹ This proposal would rescind a 2015 regulation that finally brought most home care workers under the FLSA, and restore a racist and sexist exclusion that the 2015 regulation sought to rectify.²

If the federal rollback of home care workers' labor protections is implemented, this rule will likely impact thousands of home care workers across the country living in states who do not protect home care workers or defer to federal exemptions in their state laws. Removing the most minimum standards for home care workers' pay could drive these already underpaid workers

¹ Application of the Fair Labor Standards Act to Domestic Service, 90 Fed. Reg. 28976 (July 2, 2025).

² See Veronica Faison & Julie Vogtman, *NWLC Comments on DOL's Proposed Rule Stripping Home Care Workers of Basic Labor Protections*, NWLC (Sept. 2, 2025), <https://nwlc.org/resource/nwlc-comments-on-dols-proposed-rule-stripping-home-care-workers-of-basic-labor-protections/>.

deeper into poverty or out of the industry altogether—thereby also impacting many families who rely on home care, which is already hard to find.

The direct care industry—made up almost entirely of women, predominantly women of color and disproportionately immigrant women—is already plagued with job quality issues that make it difficult for workers to survive and care for their own families. Home care workers are paid the least among direct care workers. Even with minimum wage and overtime protections, home care workers in Oregon typically make around \$24,000 annually; as a result, more than one in 10 (13%) live in poverty, and 61% rely on at least some public assistance (such as Medicaid and SNAP) to make ends meet and support their families.³

As people continue to face age and disability, the need for long-term care and support is expected to increase dramatically: The home care workforce alone is projected to add over 681,000 new jobs from 2024 to 2034—more new jobs than any other occupation in the U.S.⁴ But it is frequently difficult for employers to attract and retain staff due to the poor job quality direct care workers so often experience. Nationally, the turnover rate for home care workers is close to 80%.⁵ And worker shortages make it harder for disabled people and older adults to access the care they need, especially in the settings they prefer, like their homes.

While the federal government may devalue home care work as “companionship” and unworthy of basic labor protections, Oregon deeply knows the importance of this work to families, and knows that these workers deserve to have jobs that support their ability to live and thrive—and that begins with ensuring their basic rights to a minimum wage and overtime pay.

For all of these reasons, we urge the Committee—and the full legislature—to pass SB 1518.

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Please do not hesitate to contact Veronica Faison at vfaison@nwlc.org if you have questions or require additional information. Thank you for your consideration.

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³ See *Workforce Data Center*, PHI (last accessed Feb. 5, 2026), <https://www.phinational.org/policy-research/workforce-data-center/> (State Data—Oregon).

⁴ 8.9 million job openings, including existing jobs that need to be filled when workers leave the industry. *Direct Care Workers in the United States: Key Facts 2025*, PHI (Sept. 15, 2025), <https://www.phinational.org/resource/direct-care-workers-in-the-united-states-key-facts-2025/>.

⁵ Joyce Famakinwa, *Home Care's Industry-Wide Turnover Rate Reaches Nearly 80%*, HOME HEALTH CARE NEWS, (July 3, 2024), <https://homehealthcarenews.com/2024/07/home-cares-industry-wide-turnover-rate-reaches-nearly-80/>.