



*Testimony in Support of HB 4089 (2026)*

Chair Jama, Vice Chair Starr and members of the Senate Rules committee,

My name is Kate Suisman. I am an attorney at the Northwest Workers' Justice Project (NWJP). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important bill. We represent workers in low-wage jobs when bad things happen to them at work: when they are not paid, or are discriminated against for being in a protected class or are retaliated against for speaking up. Finally, we engage in policy advocacy and try to bring the important perspectives of workers in low-wage jobs and immigrant workers to these policy discussions.

For twenty years, NWJP has been focused on ending wage theft. Yet despite the hundreds of cases we have successfully litigated and won alongside workers, wage theft continues mostly unabated. We even ran a coalition to stop wage theft for many years, and I think it is safe to say we have not stopped wage theft. Though we have certainly raised awareness on the issue, and it feels like a victory that the term "wage theft" is used regularly in the Capitol, and that there is widespread consensus that eradicating wage theft is necessary for workers, business owners who are following the law, and for our tax base.

Thank you to Representative Tran for her the hard work on this bill, and to Senator Neron Misslin for leading on this bill in the Senate. I also appreciate the excellent discussion your committee had on this bill at the public hearing. Senator Manning's comments show a deep understanding of how wage theft works on the ground, and how wage theft affects all types of workers. I also appreciate Senators Thatcher and Starr's comments and support for the bill.

The bill before you today aims to recalibrate that calculated decision to steal wages that some employers make, and remind them that they could face significant financial penalties and even jail time if they steal workers' wages.

NWJP has general reservations about criminal enforcement since it historically has not been applied equally, and outcomes vary significantly depending on a defendant's race, ethnicity, language and other characteristics. Ideally, this bill is a warning to everyone in the construction industry, and when it is used, it is used fairly.

There are a few important parts of the B-Engrossed bill I would like to mention. It is important the bill makes clear a worker can still go to BOLI for their wage claim, since a criminal prosecution may or may not deal with that issue. It is good to see the topic of repeated wage theft being added to the purview of the interagency compliance network as well.

But the heart of the bill is the new and strengthened criminal penalties created here. NWJP has repeatedly had to explain to construction lawyers and their clients that there is a law called the

Oregon Contractor Registration Act, and that they are breaking this law by hiring unlicensed labor contractors. The new Class A misdemeanor for *knowingly* contracting with unlicensed construction labor broker and (and a Class C Felony for a second *knowing* violation,) will hopefully create a much-needed deterrent for those that are currently hiring unlicensed labor brokers. The bill also bumps up the current CCB violation for using another's license without their authorization to a Class C Felony, and using another's license with the intent to deceive the public, with or without the authorization of the licensed contractor, to a Class C Felony.

We hope this bill will deter construction entities from taking the low road.

Thank you sincerely.