



# PRESS RELEASE

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## **Employment Civil Rights Bills Receive First Public Hearings in House Committee**

### *House Bills 2861 and 2862 Protect Workers from Discrimination*

(Salem) Two bills to protect the civil rights of employees were heard today in the House Committee on Business and Labor. Sponsored by Representative Tina Kotek (D- N/NE Portland) and introduced on behalf of the Oregon Council on Civil Rights, the bills expand protections for workers under Oregon employment law.

“We’d all like to think that Oregon is immune from discriminatory employment practices, but there is still a need for enhanced protections,” said Representative Kotek. “There are unacceptable gaps in non-discrimination law.”

House Bill 2861 expands provisions under wage and hour law that prohibit wage discrimination based on sex. Currently, it is a violation of employment law to pay workers differently based on sex for work of comparable character requiring comparable skills. With House Bill 2861, wage discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, disability, age or expunged juvenile record would be similarly unlawful.

“Oregon was a leader on issues of equality and model for civil rights for other states and the federal government when we banned wage discrimination based on gender in 1955,” said Representative Margaret Doherty (D- Tigard), a member of the House Committee on Business and Labor who also testified in support of the bills. “We should have included non-discrimination provisions for all protected classes a long time ago.”

House Bill 2862 modifies the definition of “employee” to include interns, student teachers, volunteers, and other unpaid workers. This gap in employment protections received significant attention last fall when a student teacher in the Beaverton School District was dismissed for being openly gay. State employment law did not protect the teacher because he was not receiving pay for his work and thus was not technically an employee.

“For students and individuals changing careers, unpaid work in internships and volunteer opportunities is a good way to get a foot in the door. Workers in these positions deserve to be treated fairly, with the same kinds of protections provided for paid employees,” said Representative Kotek.

The bills must be scheduled for a work session in order to move to a vote in the House of Representatives.

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