

**INTERNATIONAL
BROTHERHOOD OF ELECTRICAL WORKERS**
LOCAL UNION NO. 932

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Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Hayden, members of the committee on Labor and Business,

My name is Robert Westerman and I am a resident of Newport, Oregon. I serve as Business Manager of IBEW Local Union 932 and have served in that role for 27 years, representing electricians in our rural jurisdiction along the Central and Southern Oregon Coast.

I also serve as the President of the Oregon Association of Electrical Workers, comprised of the seven (7) IBEW Local Unions with jurisdiction in Oregon representing over 10,000 working men and women employed under collective bargaining agreements in the Electrical and Energy sectors. I have also served in the past as Co-Chair of the Prevailing Wage Advisory Committee under then Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian.

I am testifying today in opposition to SB 1566.

Prevailing wage rates are industry negotiated rates. Unlike the wages offered by non-Union employers, they are neither arbitrary nor capricious. They are established through the negotiations of the workers of each of our trades and the multiple employers for those trades that are signatory to our collective bargaining agreements. These wage rates are industry established **Labor Standards**.

Prevailing wage requirements are **good policy** for Oregon. Prevailing wage is a composite of our labor rate, our health insurance, and our pensions. Those wages flow immediately back into our local economies, allowing individuals doing the work to live and thrive within their communities. These projects utilize local apprentices that are looking to grow to journey-level and will support their local economies, which in turn supports the services those localities can provide to their residents. Looking for ways around fair wages is never the answer.

As a stated goal of this bill is to address affordable housing and veterans' housing, I would like to point to a project that is currently underway in my coastal community. This project will provide 176 units of affordable housing:

- Families with incomes up to 60% AMI will be eligible for housing in this development.
- 30 units will be designated for individuals and families earning 30% AMI and below.
- 20 Permanent Supportive Housing units will be available on-site, with Coos Health and Wellness embedding staff to provide services and support – *while mental health support is*

something many Oregonians are in need of, we know this is notably true among veterans and trauma survivors.

- **Phase I includes 105 affordable housing units**, designed to provide stability and opportunity for local families.

Notably, this project is being built following BOLI's Prevailing-Wage requirements. Those requirements have not hindered the progress of this important project. In fact, it is ahead of schedule.

Our Union construction industry has proven time and again to be essential, and has been deemed as such, officially. We braved the pandemic, we brave environmental hazards, we brave the fact that we are one of the most recession prone industries. And yet, we build, we install, we maintain, and we believe in high quality work and a workforce that feels valued, so that they keep doing it.

I ask and I urge you to vote NO on this misguided attempt to lower costs for residential construction on the backs of those essential workers.

This committee's – and all of the decision makers in power – should be focused on labor standards and exemplifying that you care about those who will live and benefit from their work, and the very workers – performing back-breaking work to make it possible who simply want to go home at the end of the day, feed their families and pay their rent. Without wages that prevail, we are merely adding to the number of individuals who cannot afford their homes.

A roll back on these proven standards is contradictory to the stated goal of this bill.

Please vote no on SB 1566.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Robert Westerman
Business Manager
IBEW Local Union 932