

ALLOW EMPLOYERS THE FLEXIBILITY TO DEAL WITH WORKPLACE MANDATES

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Oregon employers are trying to absorb an unusually high number of workplace policies mandated in recent legislative sessions—from higher minimum wages to paid sick leave. Employers are making good faith efforts to implement these policies as effectively as possible, but they need more collaboration from state government. Most importantly, additional mandates that reduce the ability of businesses to manage their workforces should not be considered until those already enacted have been fully implemented.

Recommendations

- Preserve the Legislature’s authority as state policymakers by pre-empting all local wage, hour, and benefits mandates.
- Support workplace policies that allow employers to manage their enterprises without unnecessary government intrusion or mandates.
- Support workplace policies that give employers maximum ability to tailor workplace policies to the needs of their employees.
- Before adding new employment mandates, allow time to evaluate the impact of recently enacted workplace mandates on businesses’ financial health, ability to manage workforces, willingness to locate in Oregon, ability to hire new workers and opportunity youth, employee job satisfaction, and number of small business openings.
- Maximize the cost-effectiveness and benefit quality of Oregon’s workers compensation system.
- Promote ongoing collaboration between OR-OSHA and Oregon employers to assure continuous improvements in workplace safety.
- Support policies that broaden the pool of available workers.

Oregon has strong foundational workplace laws that allow employers to be competitive locally, nationally, and internationally. For example, the workers’ compensation system reform in 1990 has resulted in employer premiums that are in the bottom quartile of the nation, while providing worker benefits that are some of the strongest in the country. Oregon OSHA has had similar successes; Oregon’s workers are safer, and have fewer accidents, than most of their counterparts across the country. Historically, OR-OSHA has had a culture of collaborating with employers to make workplaces safer, both through an effective consulting department and a system of reasonable fines.

The state’s unemployment insurance system is designed to support local economies during economic downturns without overburdening employers who may be struggling. Employer rates are calculated based on several years of past economic data points, so that employers don’t end up paying high rates to support those they’ve laid off just when they themselves are struggling with the downturn.

Yet despite these supports, employers’ ability to manage their workplaces has come under increasing attack as regulations limiting flexibility are passed by the Legislature and local governments. Such mandates have increased costs and decreased employer opportunities to choose policies that work for their own employees. Allowing employers the flexibility to meet their particular workforce’s needs is one of the best ways for Oregon to support the economic health of our families and communities.