



Commissioner Brad Avakian
Bureau of Labor & Industries

Press Release

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CONTACT: Charlie Burr, (503) 913-5407 cell.

Oregon Labor Commissioner Avakian issues MLK Day message

Investment in career and technical education creates a pathway to economic justice, says Avakian

PORTLAND - Oregon Labor and Industries Commissioner Brad Avakian, chief of the state's Bureau of Labor and Industries, today issued the following statement in celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day:

"Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. dedicated his life to economic and social justice. Today, we celebrate his legacy of service not just against the most insidious forms of discrimination, but also as a pioneer in the fight to recognize the dignity of all labor.

In his last Southern Christian Leadership Conference address, Dr. King noted that "the problems of housing and education, instead of preceding the elimination of poverty, will themselves be affected if poverty is first abolished. The poor transformed into purchasers will do a great deal on their own to alter housing decay.... The dignity of the individual will flourish when the decisions concerning his life are in his own hands, when he has the means to seek self-improvement."

Today, more Oregonians enjoy greater access to economic opportunity because of Dr. King's work, yet too many workers still face unlawful discrimination, lower wages and barriers to employment and housing. As a former civil rights attorney in private practice – and today, as Oregon's Labor Commissioner enforcing the state's civil rights laws – I've worked to aggressively protect the rights of Oregon workers.

But breaking the barriers of discrimination alone will not end the cycle of poverty. We must build a foundation of true equality in which all Oregonians enjoy access to a quality education and living wage job.

Oregon can provide greater opportunity for students and young people by investing in career and technical education in our middle schools and high schools. In fact, the greatest investment we can make to create a vibrant, more just economy for the next generation of leaders is to ensure that Oregonians throughout the state enjoy access to 21st Century shop classes.

Employers consistently tell me that their workforce needs are not being met because they can't find workers with the applicable skills. We need to reverse the disinvestment in the shop classes and vocational training that were once a staple in Oregon public schools. With smart, cost-effective investments in Oregon's workforce, we can not only prepare students for the jobs of

tomorrow, but also help employers looking to fill well-paying – but difficult to fill— positions today.

Dr. King believed that one of life’s most urgent and persistent questions was: “What are you doing for others?” As a state, we should ask ourselves what we are doing for Oregon students and workers and recommit ourselves to investing in a more equitable and prosperous future. Restoring modernized shop classes and practical applications of classroom learning can create a pathway to economic justice and opportunity for Oregon students and communities.”

Visit www.oregon.gov/BOLI for more information about all of BOLI’s work to protect workers’ rights and support local employers.

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The mission of the Bureau of Labor and Industries is to protect employment rights, advance employment opportunities, and protect access to housing and public accommodations free from discrimination.