

WORKERS' COMPENSATION
MANAGEMENT-LABOR ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Full Committee Meeting

May 7, 2026

4:30 p.m.

In-person meeting

Committee members (in-person):

MLAC members and Organization they represent

Co-Chair Patrick Priest, CIS Trust

Co-Chair Scott Strickland, SMART, Local 16

Margaret Weddell, Labor Representative

Stacy Lewallen, Fortis Construction, Inc.

Sarah Merrick, City of Salem Fire Department

Emily Cronan, Oregon Nurses Association

Ryan Hearn, Anduril Industries

Sean O'Day, Director DCBS

Committee members (absent):

Sara Duckwall, Duckwall Fruit

Kim Schlessinger, Samaritan Health Services

Staff:

Teri Watson, MLAC Committee Administrator

Baaba Ampah, MLAC Assistant

Agenda Item	Discussion
Opening (00:00:27)	Affirmation and Roll Call Co-Chair Priest called the meeting to order and shared an affirmation. Teri Watson called the roll of members. A quorum was present.
 (00:02:37)	Public Comment There were no public comments.
 (00:03:30)	Review minutes from Feb. 5, Mar. 5, and Apr. 2, 2026 Emily Cronan moved to approve the meeting minutes from Feb.5, Mar. 5, and Apr. 2, 2026, and Ryan Hearn seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
 (00:04:38)	Department updates Workers' Compensation Board case law updates – Autumn Blake Autumn Blake noted that there were no updates this month.
 (00:05:01)	Workers' Compensation Division (WCD) updates – Teri Watson Teri Watson noted that there were no updates this month.

MLAC Roundtable Discussion

Matt West, WCD Administrator

- (00:05:23) Matt West provided an overview of Oregon’s workers’ compensation system, highlighting the history and impact of the 1990 Mahonia Hall reforms, which brought forth the creation the Ombuds Offices, the Preferred Worker Program, and MLAC. He explained MLAC’s structure, guiding principles, and its role in reviewing legislative proposals, as well as the committee’s 2025 subcommittee work on benefit adequacy and access to care. Administrator West stated MLAC is interested in getting out into different communities throughout the state to hear directly from workers and employers about their experiences and challenges.

MLAC Members

- (00:12:42) MLAC members introduced themselves sharing how they became involved in MLAC, what industries they represent, and their perspectives and commitment to the MLAC’s work.

- (00:27:09) MLAC support staff, Teri Watson, MLAC administrator, and Baaba Ampah, MLAC assistant, were also recognized for their work.

Stakeholder Q&A and Discussion

- (00:27:58) Beth Bunt, Evergreen Family Medicine in Roseburg thanked the MLAC for the Access-to-Care subcommittee’s work and raised two questions:
1. After hearing testimony from providers and the barriers they have, how much will MLAC take forward in the decisions they are making?
 2. Is MLAC ready for another letter in their subcommittee, noting MPLAC, to account for providers.
- (00:28:40) Emily Cronan mentioned they will bring back the recommendations of the subcommittee. She noted that the subcommittee’s initial charge morphed into a larger conversation, which is already known in the healthcare space. Although concrete plans are not developed yet, the recommendations have come to MLAC’s attention and there is an opportunity to continue to engage stakeholders and bring in additional stakeholders. And, as MLAC hears and looks at the problems, asking what solutions are going to look like, and who do we need to connect with to make it happen.
- (00:29:22) Co-Chair Strickland thanked both the Access-to-Care subcommittee co-chairs for their work. He explained that, as someone who is not a provider, it was very eye-opening to review all the subcommittee testimony and learn about the process. He said that having MLAC members do the work helps build institutional knowledge to incorporate in future bills and concepts. The combination of stakeholder education, MLAC direction, and the legislative process move together in an efficient way. He added that ideas often float
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around for years before they show up in a bill, and sometimes MLAC has already done part of the work, which then continues in a subcommittee. He said the subcommittee opened up many questions, and although members are committed, they don't have the capacity to do it in one bite.

- (00:31:01) Administrator West added that the division, which writes rules and develops the fee schedules, is looking internally at the subcommittee's recommendations and testimony heard over the summer to help make improvements.
- (00:31:21) Taran, Cascadia Thermal Springs Spa and Hotel in Portland, mentioned that one of the major pain points since working in Portland (and has worked in nine states) is scheduling IMEs (Independent Medical Examinations) because employers continue paying losses and other expenses if they cannot get the worker back to work. She asked if this issue can be discussed by the committee or if it has already been discussed.
- (00:32:14) Ryan Hearn stated that IMEs are difficult, and that scheduling IMEs comes down to provider access. This is part of the greater [access to] care problem in Oregon and having medical providers available to not only perform IMEs, but to treat workers in general. He suggested utilizing all IME vendors to help identify a schedule that works best, but said the goal is to get the injured worker back to medical stationery to ensure that time loss is minimal for both the injured worker and employer. Ryan added that although the committee could consider discussing IMEs, the issue still comes back to IME companies having schedule availability and providers being able to take on those IMEs.
- (00:33:26) Co-Chair Priest noted that the MLAC previously discussed open-ended time loss, recognizing that delays in obtaining medical evaluations often leave workers on extended leave. Because the problem has not been solved, it remains on MLAC's workplan. He encouraged attendance at MLAC meetings as it is exciting to hear people bring forward ideas.
- (00:34:15) Co-Chair Strickland noted that these types of stakeholder engagements are helpful to MLAC because it helps them understand the issues and connect them to questions related to rules, laws, or other workers compensation topics. He recommended contacting MLAC Administrator, Teri Watson, to provide a public comment, give a presentation, or request the issue be added to the MLAC workplan.
- (00:34:58) Emily Cronan stated that IMEs are another arm to access to care issues. While she described it as a microscopic issue, she mentioned that it is a problem for everyone. Emily explained that the solutions being discussed will hopefully snowball into improved statewide access to care, and more IME providers or first-reported-injury providers available in the community. She added that although there are complexities around some of the administrative pieces, the goal is to give more capacity to those who are working to take care of people.
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- (00:36:21) Diane from Kaiser, in honor of nurses' appreciation week, showed appreciation to Emily Cronan.
- (00:36:50) Administrator West asked what happens when MLAC cannot reach an agreement within the committee or their own caucuses. Co-chair Strickland responded that during Covid things were more challenging, and confusing in workers' compensation and in all facets of life; but one outcome that came from Covid, was a more collaborative way of moving forward on issues. He explained that MLAC went through and revamped the process to improve collaboration, including working on subcommittees together and deferring work to subcommittees when there is not uniform agreement. He noted that, as Administrator West mentioned, the system is very delicate with many stakeholders, and it is an intricate web that touches every part of industry in the state. A vote could unravel a lot of things quickly in a way that is difficult to put back together. Co-Chair Strickland stated there aren't really times when MLAC cannot reach consensus, but when there are it means the work is not done yet. And, MLAC has an understanding to handoff the issue to a subcommittee and engage stakeholders. A lot of being able to reach consensus depends on stakeholder engagement, and an inability to reach consensus is because stakeholders may not have a solution yet. Co-Chair Strickland noted that that MLAC wants to give stakeholders time and support to work through the process of coming up with something, so that they can get uniform consensus on.
- (00:39:45) Co-Chair Priest agreed with Co-Chair Strickland and mentioned that he does not have the Covid-era perspective, but he appreciates the way they work together. He said that if management is not on board with a solution, Co-Chair Strickland respects that, and he does the same for labor. He noted that if both caucuses do not agree, then MLAC does not support the proposal.
- (00:40:46) Administrator West acknowledged Senator Courtney Neron Misslin, of District 13 for attending and supporting MLAC.
- (00:41:06) With no further business, attendees were invited to stay for the reception, networking, and exhibitor booths.
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- (00:41:16) Co-Chair Priest adjourned the meeting at 5:16 p.m.

*These minutes include time stamps from the meeting video found here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZ5fUSlmZFM>

**Referenced documents can be found on the MLAC Meeting Information page here:
<https://www.oregon.gov/dcbs/mlac/Pages/2026-meetings.aspx>