



**For Immediate Release**

October 6, 2016

CONTACT: Charlie Burr, (971) 673-0788, BOLI  
Shelley M. Snow, (503) 986-3438, ODOT

**Apprenticeship study looks at ODOT/BOLI efforts to diversify the highway construction workforce**  
*Despite gains, many apprentices face difficult and hostile work environments*

PORTLAND, OR—A new ODOT/BOLI-commissioned report finds that Oregon’s construction workforce is growing more diverse, although significant barriers remain for women and people of color seeking careers in the construction trades.

Oregon is one of only a handful of states that takes advantage of federal highway funding to draw more women and people of color into highway construction apprenticeships. Funds are used in part for supportive services, including helping with transportation costs, child care and job readiness supplies such as tools and specialty clothing for eligible apprentices.

The report, conducted by Portland State University sociology professors Lindsey Wilkinson and Maura Kelly, represents part of an ongoing effort to track progress and identify barriers to apprenticeship success. In the report, the authors find that women and people of color were less likely than their white male counterparts to complete construction apprenticeships.

However, apprentices who received ODOT/BOLI supportive services saw across-the-board increases in rates of completion. Women of color, for example, saw completion rates more than double when they received **supportive services (56 percent when receiving services vs. 24 percent completion rate without).**

Although Oregon has the highest percentage of recently-enrolled female highway construction apprentices in the country, hostile and discriminatory workplaces continue to drive down apprenticeship completion rates for women and minorities. In the report, 60 percent of white women and 67 percent of women of color reported experiencing some form of direct discrimination on the jobsite.

“Today’s report underscores the need for proactive measures so that more women and people of color have access to good jobs and economic advancement,” said Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian. “Both our highway construction workforce and our transportation infrastructure itself are aging. Despite the gains we’ve made diversifying the construction workforce, more work is needed to ensure harassment-free workplaces where apprentices can thrive.”

Earlier this year, ODOT and BOLI launched a respectful workplaces initiative that emphasizes bystander intervention to address discrimination and increase apprenticeship retention rates. Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc. (OTI) is developing the program as part of a two-year pilot program to boost completion rates and reduce harassment on highway construction job sites.

“We will continue our work with BOLI and other partners to improve the opportunities for learning and developing professionals in the transportation trades,” said ODOT Director Matt Garrett. “ODOT is committed to investing in the next generation of diverse, skilled workers to meet the demands of a 21<sup>st</sup> century transportation system.”

Jobs in the highway, street, and bridge construction industry — jobs that typically provide family-supporting wages with good benefits and little college debt — are projected to grow by more than 20 percent until 2022.

In addition to tracking progress, the report includes recommendations to increase participation and completion rates among women and people of color:

- Continue recruitment efforts
- Promote respectful, harassment-free workplaces
- Ensure equal opportunities during apprenticeship
- Improve quality of on-the-job training
- Continue financial supportive services and expand non-financial services, such as mentoring
- Strengthen and expand pre-apprenticeship programs and retention services
- Further expand awareness of ODOT/BOLI supportive services; and
- Ongoing monitoring of highway construction workforce development program funds

A copy of the report is available [here](#).

###