



**House Majority Leader Barbara Smith Warner
State Representative House District 45**

June 29, 2020

To the chairs and members of the Management-Labor Advisory Committee:

In these unprecedented times, working people in our state are desperate for support. For Oregon workers at the frontlines of the COVID-19 crisis, the financial and health toll has been immense. This is especially true for our Black, Indigenous and people of color neighbors, who make up a large share of workers in frontline industries, and who have been disproportionately impacted. Oregonians are counting on you to make it right for these workers, many of whom are employed in the lowest wage jobs in our state, by recommending the strongest possible presumed Workers' Compensation eligibility for COVID-19. No one should have to worry about how they are going to pay for medication or buy food because they have been exposed to or gotten sick with COVID-19 in their workplace.

Among the professions I would ask you to prioritize are:

- First responders;
- Health care industry workers (including janitors, caregivers in long term care and senior living facilities, and home health care workers);
- Food chain workers – from farm workers to processing plant workers to grocery store workers;
- Transit workers;
- And other workers whose employer has had a notable outbreak of the virus within their business.

I have heard concerns from business that including any presumption might increase Workers' Compensation rates. While I understand the concern of rising costs during challenging economic times, I believe the health and safety of workers must take precedence. Our renowned Workers' Compensation system, with its low rates and strong reserves, is well funded and resilient, and capable of taking care of Oregonians in this time of need. Further, it will be critical for the inextricably combined recovery of the economic and physical health of Oregon and Oregonians that we ensure workers are able to stay safe and stay home if they are sick or exposed, and that businesses are being incentivized to act responsibly as they reopen.

We can get through this crisis if we can come together to do what is right. It is right for Oregon to join the 17 other states that have already added a COVID-19 presumption to their Worker's Compensation systems. For the health of Oregonians, for the future of our state, I urge you to recommend the strongest possible proposal. Oregonians have waited long enough.

Sincerely,

Rep. Barbara Smith Warner
House District 45
Oregon House Majority Leader