



OREGON STATE FIRE FIGHTERS COUNCIL

International Association of Fire Fighters
AFL-CIO CLC

Solutions Testimony

July 15, 2020

Co-Chairs Winther and Wood, Committee Members and Administrator Van Winkle,

For the record, my name is Karl Koenig, President of the Oregon State Fire Fighters Council representing over 3500 career suppression, prevention wildland and aircraft crash fire fighters, Emergency Medical Technicians and Paramedics.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the solutions phase of this process before your committee. COVID 19 has stretched our collective wisdom, common sense and our resources over the last five or so months.

This process compiled a collection of problems, success stories and best practices during the last month offering a substantial challenge list on both Workers Compensation Claims and Worker Safety issues. While not exhaustive these lists can only be considered a start of a bigger discussion expanding outside this Committees charge.

From the onset of this pandemic Oregon's essential workers remained at work in less than ideal conditions, unknown and ever changing Personal Protective Equipment requirements, contradictory transmission pathways and improper workplace engineering.

Fortunate for some in the workplace, their employer heeded the guidance and placed engineered solutions with advice from their Workers Compensation carriers. Claims, quarantine leave, medical costs were paid, and unconventional leave banks were created. In these examples, essential workers did not have the security issues in the event of an exposure or symptomatic COVID 19 diagnosis. Unfortunately, this experience can only be told by approximately 60% of Oregon's essential workforce. The other 40 or so percent have the doubt or pressure that a claim would be accepted, lack of education, or even filed for fear of retaliation as the result of a suspected workplace exposure.

We can do better. Our team of worker advocates are asking this committee for a rebuttable COVID 19 presumption that closely follows several employers and Workers Compensation Carrier practices to date. Codifying these proposals in legislation creates fair, balanced, comprehensive, predictable, consistent and compassionate practices to bridge the gap for all of Oregon's essential workers.

Moving forward, we are asking this committee to unanimously approve a COVID 19 presumption that covers time loss, testing, contract tracing and medical costs for all essential workers in Oregon.

The Oregon State Fire Fighters Council thanks the committee in advance for their consideration and dedication to Oregon's essential workers.

Regards,

Karl Koenig /s

Karl Koenig
President
Oregon State Fire Fighters Council