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**Senate Committee Extends Minimum Wage to Public Workers with Disabilities**  
SB 555 advances to Ways and Means

Oregon became the first state in the country to have a legislative committee vote to extend minimum wage protections to workers with disabilities today. Senate Bill 555, sponsored by Senator Sara Gelser (D-Corvallis), would require that all individuals working on public contracts in Oregon make at least minimum wage—even if they have disabilities.

“No one should be forced to work for 25 cents an hour, especially on a public contract. SB 555 is the first step towards ensuring wage equality for all Oregonians, including those with disabilities,” said Gelser. “This is a matter of basic fairness. Oregonians with disabilities should enjoy the same rights as their neighbors and friends. That includes minimum wage protections.”

Under current federal law, individuals with disabilities can be paid “productivity wages” that fall well below the minimum wage. During legislative hearings last month, an employer from Albany described paying workers 25 cents an hour to shred paper on machines that are 2 decades old. Another business, Portland Habilitation Center, described investing in technology to increase the productivity and earning power of people with disabilities.

SB 555 applies only to contracts with state and local governments, and the public entities will be required to cover the cost of the increased wages. Agencies holding these contracts include the Oregon Department of Transportation, the Oregon Liquor Control Commission and the Oregon Department of Justice for tasks including custodial work and the manufacture of ODOT vests. The average current wage for workers in these positions is approximately \$5.50 an hour. The bill is expected to impact about 500 Oregon workers.

“This bill is a modest step towards wage equality for all Oregon workers. It makes sense that we would start this transition with public contracts,” said Gelser. “When public entities contract with citizens, they should ensure the people doing that work make at least minimum wage.”

The bill passed the Senate Workforce Committee on a bipartisan 4-1 vote, and now moves to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means for further consideration.

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