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Testimony of D. Michael Dale
Before the House Committee on Business and Labor
February 15, 2016
SB 1532 – Raise the Wage

I am the Executive Director of the Northwest Workers' Justice Project. I have been a lawyer in Oregon since 1977, and have spent most of that time representing low wage, marginalized workers. The Northwest Workers' Justice Project provides legal representation to low wage contingent workers throughout the economy in sectors such as construction, building maintenance, landscaping, hotel and restaurant industry, food processing, agriculture and reforestation.

Many of our clients work at or below the Oregon minimum wage. Most are contingent workers, i.e., workers who are employed for as much of the time as they can find work, but who do not have a permanent full time job. This structure of employment is becoming increasingly common in our modern economy, especially since the great recession. By 2020, over forty percent of workers are projected to become contingent, “pseudo employees” who will lack the same workplace protections as formal employees.¹ Such workers are forced to piece together many different short term jobs in order to survive and support their families. When the economy falters, or the season changes, contingent workers will often experience periods of unemployment or under-employment.

This committee has heard many accounts of the difficulty Oregon families are having making ends meet at the current minimum wage level. These problems are real. For harvest workers, landscapers, car wash workers, house painters, roofers, and framers these problems are multiplied by the need to somehow squeeze out enough money to pay the rent and feed families during times when work is slow.

Too often, the result is hunger and homelessness. For kids this means disruption of education and poor adjustment.

For all of these reasons, we have endorsed the Raise the Wage and \$15 now campaigns. Though SB 1532 raises the wage far too slowly, and leaves much of the state with very modest increases, at least it reflects the reality that Oregon workers and families need a raise.

¹ INTUIT, INTUIT 2020 REPORT: TWENTY TRENDS THAT WILL SHAPE THE NEXT DECADE 20 (2010) (projecting various changes in labor markets).