

Testimony in Support of the Oregon Corporate Accountability Act, SB 750
Senate Committee on Workforce
April 4, 2019

My name is Matilda. I used to work at Casa Diablo as a dancer. Like many clubs, Casa Diablo at the time treated its dancers as independent contractors. This was their excuse to avoid paying us the minimum wage, charge us unlawful fines and fees, and generally mistreat us across the board, knowing that because we thought we were independent contractors and had no employment rights, we were unlikely to fight back.

After years of dehumanizing behavior, including non-consensual groping by the manager and bouncers and other sexual harassment, I decided to fight back. I sued the club for back wages, unlawful fees, and battery. Only one other dancer joined my case. Many others were too afraid of retaliation or believed the club owners who say they would have to close if they had to pay dancers the minimum wage. I settled my case, but was disappointed to see that almost nothing changed at Casa Diablo or other clubs. Clearly more widespread enforcement is needed, but I can see why dancers are scared – I was blacklisted from the industry and have been threatened and ostracized by other dancers who don't want to be seen as associated with me.

I am still working as a dancer advocate though. Since my case, I have been working to educate other dancers about their rights. I believe that dancers' status as stigmatized workers in the legal grey area between regular employment and working as independent contractors paves the way for unsafe and abusive workplaces to flourish. I want people to know, and I especially want strippers to know that these conditions are illegal. We do have rights; we just have to find a way to enforce them. We deserve better and we can get better.

My club was an extreme example, but the conditions there are not materially different at other clubs. They all operate on the same basic model of misclassifying dancers. There is an industry standard that it is normal to charge dancers stage fees, and bouncer fees, and DJ fees, and make them pay fines if they don't take off their clothes fast enough or if they are chewing gum on stage.

When something is so ingrained in the industry, real systemic enforcement is necessary to change the abusive practices. If we had a law like SB 750, dancers would be able to steer that enforcement where other efforts have failed. Since the bill allows workers to work with community organization to enforce their rights anonymously, dancers wouldn't have to worry as much about being publically outed and exposed to future harassment or stigma if they decide to move on to other kinds of work. I think SB 750 will give dancers and other marginalized workers another way to hold companies accountable. We shouldn't be treated like this. Thank you for your time.