

Our Rights at Work

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This our political advice, and should not be taken as legal advice. Consult the sources given below and a union or a pro-worker, pro-union attorney for legal advice.

The most important right that we have at work is to organize ourselves into a union of some kind. This means that we have to right to talk to our co-workers about protesting bad working conditions and low wages off the clock and away from work and, most of the time, to post items on social media and to wear buttons or other insignia at work about our issues, and to form a committee to meet with the bosses and demand changes and recognize our workers' organization or union. Of course, it's more complicated than protesting and demanding changes, and most bosses break the law or push back when challenged. Don't let the bosses stop you: keep reaching out to co-workers off the clock and away from work, find the common issues that build unity, and keep everyone involved and on the same page. Contact a union as you're doing this or build an organization in your workplace that can fight the boss every day on the job and protect everyone.

Other than the right to organize and certain legal protections against discrimination and unsafe working conditions, workers have no rights at work unless they have a union and a union contract. Enforcing the laws that are supposed to help us requires unity between workers, commitment, action, and leadership by majorities of workers in a workplace. Enforcing the law is more about workers acting together than it is about having "a good lawyer," though solidarity from legal workers and a good attorney or union organizers really helps.

Not all of the laws are fair or have teeth in them, and a legal case between you and your boss can take years to resolve. We get around this by organizing, pushing back in solidarity with one another, asking for help from other workers and organizations in our communities, taking care of one another, and getting active politically.

No one should go out on a limb by themselves. Anyone who is engaging in organizing or protesting at work needs to be extra careful about their work and work habits. Workers should make decisions and build support for one another in groups, groups should act together, and groups have to expand. If you're not growing, you're losing. It takes courage to take on a boss, and courage comes from numbers. Get everything in writing, keep a diary in your own handwriting of everything that happens every day at work, don't keep your diary at work, have witnesses to everything that happens, and don't meet with the boss alone. It's okay to trust within reason, but verify everything that you're told. Don't refuse to obey a direct order unless it endangers your health and safety, and don't do anything on or off the job that breaks the chain of command at work unless you're making it clear that you're engaging in collective and concerted activity having to do with your wages, hours, or working conditions.

Where do you start and what do you need to get started? Here is a list of links to help you get started. Some of these—like Jobs with Justice—are solidarity organizations that help workers push back. Some of these—like ROC United—help particular kinds of workers. The unions that are listed here may be able to help you get organized. Some unions, like the United Electrical Workers or IBEW Local 280 or UFCW Local 555, organize many kinds of workers, so please check them out. Then we have a list of contacts for basic labor, workplace safety, workers' comp, and other worker rights. Some of the organizations here do not yet have members in Oregon, but they would welcome your support and they're worth studying. And we have included a few groups who fight to expand our rights and that need your solidarity and support. There is an organization here for just about everyone, but if you don't see one that meets your needs then please dig through the links that they provide or connect with us.

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Jobs with Justice (National): <https://www.jwj.org/>
Jobs with Justice (Portland): <https://jwjpx.org/>
Day labor organizing: <https://portlandvoz.org/>
Labor law organizing: <https://www.nelp.org/>
Restaurant workers organizing: <https://rocunited.org/>
Walmart workers organizing: <https://united4respect.org/>
Fight for a \$15 minimum wage: <https://fightfor15.org/>
Women in the trades: <https://tradeswomen.net/>
United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America: <https://www.ueunion.org/>
United Food & Commercial Workers Union, Local 555: <https://www.ufcw555.org/about-local-555/>
National Writers Union: <https://nwu.org/>
Freelancers: <https://www.freelancersunion.org/>
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 280: <http://www.ibew280.org/>
Nurses: <https://www.oregonrn.org/default.aspx>
Educational workers: <https://www.oregoned.org/member-resources/know-your-rights>
Educational workers: <http://or.aft.org/>
Oregon AFL-CIO: <https://orafcio.org/>
Trades & apprenticeship programs: https://www.unionjobs.com/staffing_list_educational.php
LGBTQIA workers: <https://www.prideatwork.org/>
Black Workers for Justice: <https://blackworkersforjustice.com/>
Labor Council for Latin American Advancement: <https://lclaa.org/workers-rights/>
Discrimination complaints: <https://www.jwj.org/resources/for-workers>
Help for laborers with wage theft and injuries on the job: <https://portlandvoz.org/laborer-resources/online-resources>
Low-wage, immigrant, and contingent worker resources and solidarity: <http://nwjp.org/>
Help with Workers' Comp: <https://www.oregon.gov/dcbs/oiw/Pages/index.aspx>
Workers' rights in Oregon (BOLI): <https://www.oregon.gov/BOLI/Pages/index.aspx>
Oregon Occupational Safety & Health: <https://osha.oregon.gov/Pages/index.aspx>
Legal support links: <https://oregonlawhelp.org/issues/work/rights-of-workers?channel=law%2Dhelp&category=housing%2Drights%2Dfor%2Dsurvivors>
Retail worker union rights: <https://www.ufcw555.org/weingarten-101/>
Teamsters Union member rights & organizing: <https://www.tdu.org/>
Labor & the environment: <https://www.labor4sustainability.org/>