

May 2nd, 2024

Attn: Rules Coordinator  
Workers' Compensation Division  
WCD.Policy@dcbs.oregon.gov

Re: Proposed Changes to Rules Regarding Vocational Assistance to Injured Workers

Dear Workers' Compensation Division:

We are writing to express our strong support for the proposed amendments to the rules relating to eligibility for workers without authorization to work in the United States.

Voz is a worker-led nonprofit organization serving Portland which operates the only Worker Center in Oregon. Historically, the largely immigrant, BIPOC, and low-income day laborer populations we serve have been marginalized, underserved, underpaid, and discriminated against in myriad ways, including in their pursuit of work and at job sites once hired. Voz was founded by day laborers who came together, began identifying shared community needs, and were dedicated to fueling grassroots solutions. We continue strongly in this legacy today. Voz believes that sustainable and transformative justice work must be led by the communities most affected and with the greatest lived experience. Our core mission is to empower diverse day laborers (including domestic workers) to improve their working conditions and protect civil rights, including fair wages and a safe working environment.

Workers without work authorization sustain Oregon's economy by performing some of the most dangerous and physically demanding jobs, in industries such as agriculture, construction, forestry, and firefighting. Under the current system, those who are injured qualify for medical coverage, and with successful treatment may return to the same job they had before. If, however, the injury results in permanent disability that prevents them from returning to the job held when injured, they do not qualify for the vocational rehabilitation services designed to help such workers return to the workforce.

Workers without work authorization particularly struggle to find jobs that do not require hard labor due to a lack of language skills and education. This forces those with disabilities to make an impossible choice. If they follow their physician's instructions, they are left with no earning capacity, a result that harms not only the workers but also their dependents, many of whom are U.S. citizens. Often, they instead return to the same or similar work--despite constant pain or risk of exacerbating their injury--in order to provide for their families. Or, they are forced to return to their countries of origin where they face dire circumstances simply because they have no options for alternative work here, despite being available to fill our country's labor shortage.



**Voz Worker Center**  
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The current rules have thus created a disposable workforce who, while healthy, are welcomed into the workplace in many areas where others refuse to work, but once injured, are disposed of or told to suffer in silence. We support your timely efforts to put an end to such abuse. No group of vulnerable workers should be treated as lesser because of their status in the US when they are otherwise welcomed to work and take on dangerous duties.

Sincerely,

*Annica Maxfield*

Annica Maxfield  
Leadership and Education Program Manager  
Voz Workers' Rights Education Project