

To the Members of the Senate Business and Labor Committee,

Over the past decade, statistics have shown that Montana has some of the highest workers' compensation rates in the country. Just this last fall, a national study ranked us as the number one state in the nation for work comp costs. The Labor-Management Advisory Council worked hard over the last few years to uncover and analyze the cost drivers to the system, and one of the biggest is frequency of injury and death rates.

Since then, the Montana Chamber has been active in reminding businesses about their duty to provide a safe workplace. Not only that, but we have started to become a resource for businesses, especially small businesses, in order to help employers provide safer workplaces. In the past two years, the Montana Chamber has hosted seminars to write safety plans, broadcast free safety webinars for Chamber members, and was one of the original brainstorming members in the creation of WorkSafeMT.

Montana's status as the highest workers' compensation premium costs coupled with our high accident rate also led to the creation of the Montana Chamber's workers' compensation program – "Montana Safety Choices." Our goals through this program are to: (1) decrease workplace accidents and injuries through safety training and education; and (2) provide safe small employers with reductions in workers' compensation premiums. In just the first year of the program, Montana Safety Choices had an excellent safety history and will provide participating businesses with a retro return on premium of around 25%.

The Montana Chamber is supportive of HB 186 because it makes funding of safety programs, education and safety social marketing a priority. WorkSafeMT has been able to hit the ground running this past two years, and it is important for this non-profit corporation to continue. Because HB 186 is tied to the consensus work comp reform bill, HB 334, employers will not see their rates go up overall with the passage of HB 186. It's an important investment worth making for the health and safety of our workforce.

Thank you for your consideration of our thoughts on HB 186. Please give the bill a "do concur" recommendation.

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