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**PUBLIC TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 1537**  
**Wednesday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

Good morning Chair Riley and the members of the committee,

My name is Valentin Sanchez and I have been a community educator with the Oregon Law Center's Farmworker Program (OLC ) for 17 years. I speak Mixteco, Spanish, and English. I am here to speak in support of Senate Bill 1537, specifically in support of including funding for outreach.

The Oregon Law Center is a nonprofit organization that provides free legal help to low-income Oregonians to achieve justice by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. We have 10 offices, in largely rural counties around the state to better serve our low-income communities.

I am a former farmworker and along with my family have spent long hours harvesting fruit and vegetables in the San Joaquin and Willamette Valleys in the 1990s. I have also lived in various rural communities in Oregon, including Woodburn, McMinnville, and Astoria. I am here today to speak about the diversity within the farmworker population and the importance of community engagement in general and in the time of emergencies.

Migrant, seasonal and year-round farmworkers, including their family members, live and work throughout the state, as Oregon's diverse agriculture demands such labor to produce 200 plus a variety of crops and goods. Based on Dr. Alice Larson's research study on migrant and seasonal farmworkers published in 2013, Oregon is home to about 160,000 migrant and seasonal farmworkers including family members, and many of those are near the coast.

Many farmworkers speak Spanish as their first or second language and often speak very little, if any, English. Many have minimal formal education and may have limited reading and writing skills in any language. It is not unusual to find that out of a group of 10 workers in the fields harvesting blueberries or cherries that most speak no English and a few speak different versions of indigenous languages and market-level Spanish. Increasingly this language diversity is not just in seasonal fieldwork, but also in dairies, vineyards, nurseries, and the seafood industry (canneries).

My ability to speak Mixteco allows me to connect with farmworkers who speak my native language. However, Mixteco alone is not enough. Just recently, we met with a group of indigenous Guatemalan workers who spoke Chuj, Q'anjobal, and Akateko. We contracted with an interpreter to assist us in that meeting. When my colleagues and I did a



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presentation to about 10 indigenous families who spoke Mam in the Northern Coastal Area, we worked with a trilingual Mam interpreter. These are no longer unusual events. These indigenous languages are not dialects of Spanish, they are pre-Columbian indigenous languages that are distinct and have no resemblance to Spanish.

It is important to provide information about what to do in an emergency to everyone living and working in a community. As one example, a few years ago, the water supply in a town in the Valley became contaminated. Because of our earlier outreach, that town knew it needed to alert the public not only in English, Spanish and Russian but also in Mixteco. Continuous outreach and community engagement are critical so that when there are emergencies, localities can mobilize in an organized and rapid manner.

As a state, we must intentionally engage underserved communities so we do not leave vulnerable communities behind in preparation for any emergencies. That is why it is so important that SB 1537 includes funding for outreach, so we can address language barriers in needs assessments and create interventions that match the needs of the communities before the resources are allocated for training and the distribution of information. We must create culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach materials with an emphasis on visual and oral materials in the appropriate languages.

I thank you for your time and your support of SB 1537. I hope my testimony will be useful to your committee.

Sincerely,

Valentin C. Sanchez