

I am writing to support House Bill 2358 to provide overtime pay to agricultural workers in Oregon. There is simply no morally sound argument against providing agricultural workers the same rights and protections as workers in all other sectors. The Federal Labor Standards Act of 1938 excluded farmworkers from being eligible to receive overtime pay as a racist act of appeasing southern legislators. Make no mistake, this is the modern day equivalent to a Jim Crow law that has persisted because largely white land owners and industry have the lobbying power and the leverage to keep it so. This exclusion affects the LatinX community of Oregon disproportionately by several levels of magnitude.

Key arguments against this bill would have you believe that this will adversely affect farmworkers by being capped to working only 40 hours because business owners could not afford to pay overtime wages. This amounts to a bluff failing to take into account the labor shortage the Oregon agricultural sector has experienced in recent years. There simply does not exist an endless pool of willing workers to step in and replace one that has reached 40 hours in a time sensitive job and one such pool would not be created if this equitable bill is passed. As we have seen since California passed a similar law, their agricultural workers did not come flooding into Oregon to work 60 hours at standard pay as fear mongering detractors of this bill would have you believe. Further these arguments are based on the desire to keep economic models as they have been, inequitable, for the sake of the status quo. I implore you to ask if there is justice in that. These arguments that agricultural workers would prefer to continue working 60 hour weeks with no overtime pay as opposed to only 40 hours is grossly exploitative. Of course these indispensable and essential workers want to be paid what they are due in the form of overtime pay.

There are no doubt economic implications for business owners and I sympathize with those concerns. Perhaps the phasing in of overtime pay over a period of time as is being done in California will help business owners with the adjustment. In 2021 forward, in Oregon, in The United States of America, if one cannot run a profitable business based on equitable and sustainable business models, someone else will. There almost certainly will be growing pains as we move our society forward. As we saw in the labor struggle in California in the 60s and 70s, agricultural workers' rights can be improved and upheld without long term damage to industry or workers. This is a fact proven many times over in the United States.

This is very simply an issue of equal rights and I implore you to vote as such.

Thank You,  
Shaun Vrooman  
Mcminville, OR