

March 8, 2021

Good afternoon Chair Holvey, Vice-Chairs Bonham and Grayber, and Members of the House Business and Labor Committee,

My name is Odalis Aguilar Aguilar, and I am a third year student at the University of Oregon triple majoring in History, Latin American Studies, and Spanish which means that the Chair is my representative. I am also an Executive member of the Associated Students of the University of Oregon and the Oregon Student Association. I am here today to show my support for HB 2358.

This bill hits very close to home as it guarantees overtime pay to agricultural workers after 40 hours in a workweek at one and one-half times the employee's regular rate of pay. I wanted to share a little bit about my story and why I care about what this bill does.

I started working in the fields from a very young age in the summer to help my parents earn some extra money along with my siblings who are 8 years older than I am. My father was a pinero since his early 20's, up until a few years ago. My mother also had many agriculture related jobs. She has spent time working in an apple processing plant that took her away from my siblings and myself for all of our child and adolescent years. The memories I have of my father during my childhood are filled with the smell of pine that would fill up our house and the truck he took to work. During the harvest season, he would leave for work before sunrise and come home way beyond sunset. He would often work every single day, for months, and we barely were able to spend time with him.

The agricultural sector in the United States is racist and is rooted in white supremacy and slavery. This country has actively sought members of minority communities to labor the jobs that seem undesirable for others. For example, during WWI and WWII, the United States and Mexico went into an agreement where Mexicans were able to come into the U.S. and help alleviate the surplus of crops. The second time around, there was more structure in place and is widely known as the Bracero Program which ended in 1964. I also want to note that I have personally done research on the topic which I am happy to share with you a later time to explain the long history of the agricultural economy being exploitative towards farmworkers from all different backgrounds.

Before the Bracero program, the United States imported Chinese immigrants to perform agricultural labor, they also hired Native Americans, and enslaved Blacks. Poor working conditions and low wages are the reason why fruit is so "cheap" and frankly, Americans are used to paying low prices. But this is unfair, we are in 2021 and I ask you, why are we still upholding systems that are rooted in slavery? Why would we deny farm workers better wages?

Farmworkers are frontline workers who continue to show up despite facing a respiratory pandemic, wildfires, and more recently, a winter storm. Agricultural workers deserve to be paid fairly for their labor.

Farmworkers and pineros like my father, had to work more than 40 hours a week to barely provide enough to put food on our table and a roof over our heads. This bill not only provides farmworkers with overtime, but it also creates economic stability to a class of workers who have been excluded from basic labor standards such as minimum wage, collective bargaining rights, and overtime pay. Oregon would join five other states (California, Washington, New York, Minnesota, Hawaii) with some sort of overtime pay for agricultural workers.

Other sectors of labor already have laws around overtime and compensating workers adequately and it is only fair to include farmworkers as well. Oregon has a rich agricultural industry and geographically, I think ranchers would agree that the Pacific Northwest has everything needed to grow most fruits. There are plenty of farms who already pay overtime and are able to be successful.

Children should be able to spend time with their parents after work and it's heartbreaking to imagine that there are other children who share similar stories like me because their parents spend as much time as they can working endlessly to make ends meet. I urge members of this committee to vote yes on HB 2358 so that farm workers who put food on our table should be able to put food on their own table and make enough money to live decently.

Thank you for your time and once again, please vote yes on HB 2358.

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