

March 8, 2021

Chair Holvey, Vice-Chairs Grayber and Bonham, Members of the Committee,

My name is Liz Marquez, and I am a resident of Monmouth and currently attend Western Oregon University.

I am writing to urge you to vote yes on HB 2358 which guarantees overtime pay to agricultural workers.

Farmworkers are the backbone of our food system, they are essential workers who continuously show up to work despite a respiratory pandemic, wildfires and most recently a snow storm. Farmworkers perform arduous manual labor, they are exposed to the heat and pesticides. They put their health and safety at risk to ensure our families and communities are fed. Although farmworkers are essential, they are not fairly compensated for the work they provide.

Farmworkers across the country are excluded from minimum wage, overtime and child protection provisions and the people who have benefitted from their exclusion are the employers who benefit from cheap and exploited labor. Exclusion of farmworkers from the Federal Labor Standards Act (1938) is based on the racist legacy which was and is still used to maintain social and economic control over farm workers. Back then, the majority of farmworkers were Black and now we see most farmworkers are immigrants and Latinx. Overtime pay for farmworkers in Oregon is long overdue and the time to pass legislation to ensure essential workers are compensated for their labor is now.

There have been concerns from the agriculture industry who argue that paying farmworkers overtime pay would place an economic burden on growers. This same argument has been made by other occupations but over the years they have guaranteed overtime pay for those workers.

Farmworkers are skilled laborers who deserve to be paid fairly for their labor, too. As the daughter of a farmworker, I understand and have witnessed firsthand the long-term, damaging effects that come with having a parent who is a farmworker. The long hours working in the sun, the possibility of being exposed to pesticides, and the dangerous working conditions are always a concern. Not to mention the time that parents spend away from their children to be able to provide for them affects family relationships. Farmworkers have to choose between being present in their children's lives or provide for them.

Witnessing the exploitation of farmworkers, who are our parents and community members, is what often leads many children of immigrants and farmworkers, like myself, to pursue a post-secondary degree. We want to break the cycle of poverty that we have known our whole lives due to exclusionary laws that prevent our parents from being fairly compensated for their work. You have the opportunity to help change that by voting yes on HB 2358.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Liz Marquez