



March 29, 2021

Representative Holvey, Chair
Representatives Bonham and Grayber, Vice-Chairs
Members of the House Committee on Business and Labor
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

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

On behalf of the Renew Oregon coalition, I am writing to support House Bill 2358 (-3/-4 amendments), requiring overtime pay for agricultural workers who work in excess of 40 hours in a workweek.

Farmworkers are among a group of workers most impacted by the dangerous effects of the climate crisis and burning fossil fuels, such as more frequent, severe heat waves, increased smoke from growing wildfires, and exposure to diesel exhaust pollution. These hazardous working conditions come on top of what is already intense physical labor, causing terrible health outcomes for farm and agriculture workers. Wildfires happen most often during peak harvesting season when workers can earn the most money and may be forced to choose between their health and putting food on their families' table.¹

While we work diligently to combat the worst of climate change and transition to cleaner forms of energy on the farm and everywhere else, the current changes in our climate are already harming those working on the front lines. Our coalition's commitment to good-paying jobs and health communities, and our values in fighting for environmental justice, demand we seek solutions to help frontline communities burdened by the climate crisis and fossil fuel air pollution.

One of the reasons the health of farmworker communities is disproportionately harmed by these growing climate threats is a lack of access to economic resources, health care, and affordable, quality housing. Farmworkers are underpaid and exploited for their cheap labor. According to the National Agricultural Workers Survey, individual farm workers earn \$15,000 to \$17,499 a

¹ OHA, Climate and Health in Oregon 2020 Report, 21.

<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/HEALTHYENVIRONMENTS/CLIMATECHANGE/Documents/2020/Climate%20and%20Health%20in%20Oregon%202020%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf>

year and families are estimated to make between \$20,000 and \$25,000 a year.² Changing the law to allow agricultural workers access to the same overtime pay as many other types of workers already enjoy will help close this gap.

We support bringing Oregon in line with West Coast neighbors, Washington and California, as well as other leading states such as New York, Minnesota, and Hawaii in requiring overtime pay for farmworkers.

Throughout the past year, Oregonians have cheered essential workers for keeping our communities fed and taken care of during the COVID-19 pandemic. It's time we overcome the racist legacy of excluding agricultural workers from overtime pay in the Federal Labor Standards Act to maintain social and economic control of these workers. Back then, the majority of farmworkers were Black and now we see most farmworkers are immigrants from Latin America/the Carribean.³

We urge you to vote yes on HB 2358 (-3/-4 amendments) to guarantee overtime pay to agricultural workers after 40 hours in a workweek, at one and one-half times the employee's regular rate of pay. This should include farmworkers who are paid by piece-rate (how many crops they produce) or hourly. It's time for Oregon to recognize farmworkers as essential workers deserving of overtime pay. Equal is equal regardless of type of employment.

Sincerely,

Brad Reed
Campaign Manager
[Renew Oregon](#)

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[Renew Oregon](#) is a clean energy advocacy [coalition](#) of businesses and workers, healthcare professionals and parents, farmers and ranchers, faith and community organizations, and individuals coming together to move our state away from polluting energy to a clean energy economy. We are working to create good-paying jobs for all Oregonians, protect air and water from pollution, and help families stay healthy.

² National Farm Worker Ministry: Low Wages <http://nfwm.org/farm-workers/farm-worker-issues/low-wages/>

³ Farm Workers and the Fair Labor Standards Act: Racial Discrimination in the New Deal https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2205898