



February 1, 2022

Subject: Yes on HB 4002 – Farmworker Overtime

From: Bridget Cooke, Executive Director of Adelante Mujeres

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

My name is Bridget Cooke, and I am the Executive Director at Adelante Mujeres, which means “Women Rise Up”. I am writing today in support of farmworker overtime because excluding farmworkers from overtime was wrong in 1938 and it is still wrong today. Farmworkers should receive overtime pay at one and one-half times the employee’s regular rate of pay after 40 hours in a workweek.

As a non-profit organization in Washington County, Adelante Mujeres’ mission is to provide holistic education and empowerment opportunities to low-income Latina women and their families to ensure full participation and active leadership in the community. Our organization served over 13,000 individuals in 2021 with comprehensive and life-changing services — these services span from Educational, Microenterprise, and Leadership programs. Adelante strongly supports HB 4002 because a substantial number of program participants are farmworkers who have been denied rights other workers have been afforded. The organization has a long history of working alongside farmworkers through our various programs including our farmer markets, agriculture, and food sovereignty programs.

Maria, a farmworker and program participant shared that she experienced wage theft, workplace harassment, and physical and mental health problems. *“As farmworkers, there are times that we work in extreme conditions, right now ice covers the fields and yet we have to work. Sometimes when it’s very hot we also have to work. On one occasion we were working under very high temperature and the employer did not allow us to drink water, instead making sarcastic comments that referred to our immigration status,”* Maria said. Farmworkers should not be treated as second-class workers. They deserve the same rights as all other workers. They deserve to be treated humanely and with regard for their safety.

The strenuous physical labor and mental stress that farmworkers face have long term health consequences that oftentimes go untreated due to lack of health insurance. *“The emotional damage is also real. Last year I experienced a lot of anxiety, my hair fell out, at that time...I felt lifeless. My character changed,”* Maria said. In 2021 through a listening session, we identified that a top priority for immigrant and farmworking families was access to services and resources to address the elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and other mental health issues that this community faces.

Migrant and seasonal farmworkers experience higher rates of specific health problems such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and cancer than most Oregonians. Farmworkers deserve a living wage to pay for their living expenses and access to health insurance. Farmworkers are some of the lowest-paid workers in Oregon with a median income of \$28,000 a year. *“...right now they offer us insurance, but it is very expensive, it’s almost half of my paycheck and it is not possible to pay something like that,”* Maria said. Extending overtime pay protections to farmworkers will create better health conditions for farmworkers.

Farmworker overtime pay is essential to pay equity. Members of our community state that farmworker overtime pay would significantly improve their lives. One farmworker shared that during harvest season spouses and children often participate as harvesters. Because of the short-term need for extra workers these

temporary workers are often paid by the pound, or by the bucket. These types of pay structures encourage overtime work without fair wages. Farmworker overtime pay would ensure that seasonal workers get compensated for their labor and can thus continue to provide us with essential services and work.

Farmworkers are frontline workers. They show up to work and ensure we have food available despite a pandemic, wildfires, and dangerous air quality levels. It is time for us to demonstrate our commitment to the economic security of all of our workers by extending overtime pay to agricultural workers through the Farmworker Overtime bill. I urge you to pass farmworker overtime in the 2022 Legislative Session so that farmworkers in Oregon are paid fairly for their skilled and essential labor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bridget Cooke".

Bridget Cooke
Executive Director, Adelante Mujeres
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