



Jewish Federation®
OF GREATER PORTLAND



February 1, 2022

TO: House Committee on Business and Labor
RE: HB 4002

The Jewish Federation of Greater Portland supports the passage of HB 4002.

Chair Holvey and Members of the House Business and Labor Committee:

I write in my capacity as the Legislative Committee Chair of the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation, and a member of the Federation's Board of Directors.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ranks agriculture among the most hazardous industries, with a high risk of occupational injuries. According to the Oregon Health Authority, migrant and seasonal farmworkers experience higher rates of diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and cancer than most other Oregonians. They often spend long hours engaged in backbreaking labor dealing with worsening extreme weather, a pandemic, poor air quality, exposure to pesticides, and more. Farmworkers in the state, many of whom are indigenous or Hispanic, faced disproportionately higher rates of COVID-19 infection than people from other employment industries and ethnic backgrounds. The 2021 summer season in Oregon brought record breaking temperatures, while the 2020 wildfire season and related smoke happened at the peak of harvest season.

Since the creation of the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938, farmworkers have been exempted from overtime pay under Oregon and federal law. Farmworkers are not afforded to the same rights as other workers is due to the history of dispossession and racialized wage gaps.

The counterarguments generally focus on one theme – that this bill will impact profits of farm owners. Assuming that is true, it does not override the compelling reasons for giving farmworkers in Oregon overtime benefits like those enjoyed by farmworkers in California and Washington. Farmworkers wish to provide stability for their families and children. Exclusion from overtime means that farmworkers must choose between overworking to provide that stability or being able to spend time with their children. Furthermore, with increased income that reflects the workload, farmworkers will be able to spend more money where they work and live, benefitting Oregon's rural communities.

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The contentions that this bill will ultimately raise food prices for consumers, or impact farm profitability, are not serious reasons to oppose this bill. Those contentions simply show that the historical exploitation of farmworkers has been effective. Whenever an inequity is corrected, those who benefitted from the inequity may lose that benefit. That is not an argument to preserve the *status quo*. It is an argument that prioritizes our comfort and wealth over the suffering of exploited workers.

The Jewish community of Oregon is a diverse community, comprised of Democrats, Republicans, people from socio-economic strata ranging from wealthy entrepreneurs to folks in need of social safety net services, and includes communities of diverse national origins. We disagree about many things, but wage fairness is a basic value that we agree is a priority. Overtime pay and labor rights should extend to all of Oregon's 86,389 estimated farmworkers. We urge you to pass HB 4002 to ensure farmworkers in Oregon are paid fairly for their skilled and essential contribution and presence in Oregon.

Sincerely,

Hank Kaplan
Legislative Chair, Jewish Community Relations Council
Jewish Federation of Greater Portland

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