

Submitter: Eva Galvez

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Business and Labor

Measure: HB4002

Dear Chair Holvey and Members of the House Business and Labor Committee,

I am writing to you today in support of farmworker overtime. Farmworkers should receive overtime pay after 40 hours in a workweek at one and one-half times the employee's regular rate of pay. My name is Dr. Eva Galvez, I live in Portland, Oregon and I am writing to you today in support of farmworker overtime. Farmworkers should receive overtime pay after 40 hours in a workweek at one and one-half times the employee's regular rate of pay.

As a physician at Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center I have served farmworkers and their families for over 12 years. My work has given me a front row seat to the negative health effects of unpaid overtime on farmworkers and their families.

Due to nature of their job, farmworkers are at risk for accidents, musculoskeletal injuries, pesticide exposures, and environmental hazards such as smoke and heat. Long hours increase the risk of these occupational hazards. Furthermore, care for chronic conditions is often delayed or ignored, creating an even heavier burden on already poor health.

One patient who comes to mind is a farmworker that I diagnosed with diabetes four years ago. When he was first diagnosed, he was in the early stages of diabetes. At that time, a pill and lifestyle modifications would have been enough to manage his diabetes. However, I never saw him again until last spring when he came into the clinic with a foot infection and out of control sugars. Long, unpaid work hours, exacerbated by already low wages prevented him from seeking medical care, affording his medications, and accessing healthy foods that he needed to keep his diabetes under control. As a result of this infection, he sustained an amputation of his toe.

Exclusion from overtime pay also has a profound impact on mental health. Long hours often prevent farmworkers from spending time with family and engaging in activities that promote a sense of well-being. This spills into the family and impacts negatively the health and well-being of the entire farmworker family.

For me, farmworker overtime is not a political or economic issue. It is a health issue. For too long, the narrative has been that health is about what happens in the doctor's office or the medications that you take. It is far more than that. Factors such as income, housing, employment, diet, and exercise make the biggest difference of all.

Good health choices are nearly impossible when you are forced to work long hours but do not receive the benefits or compensation for your work.

Farmworker overtime is only one of many steps that must be taken in order to improve the health of farmworkers. Many more policy changes are needed in order to lift families out of poverty so they can live healthier lifestyles. Nonetheless, I believe that this it is a critical step. It is the right thing to do for them, but also for all Oregonians. The COVID-19 pandemic proved that farmworkers are essential. We need healthy farmworkers. When farmworkers are healthy, we all benefit. I urge you to pass farmworker overtime in the 2022 Oregon Legislative Session to ensure farmworkers in Oregon are paid fairly for their skills and essential labor.

Sincerely,  
Eva M. Galvez, MD