

To: House Committee on Business and Labor

Date: January 24, 2023

Re: Opposition to HB 2675

Chair Holvey, Vice Chairs Elmer and Sosa, and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, PCUN, OR AFL-CIO, and Northwest Workers' Justice Project (NWJP), we respectfully would like to express our opposition to HB 2675, which would remove the use of the state structural code to any structure located on a farm or forest operation used for agricultural purposes where up to 20 people occupy outside of harvest season, and 40 people occupy during harvest season.

Everyone deserves safe and healthy work environments. Agricultural workers are no different. During the committee meeting on 01/23, the public learned that there is a current exemption of agricultural structures used for a purpose other than growing plants in which 10 or less persons are present at any one time from the state structural speciality code. This proposal would expand that exemption to structures with an occupancy of 20 people outside of harvest and 40 people occupancy during harvest season. This means that if a seismic event, or extreme weather event compromised the structural integrity of the building, more lives would be put in jeopardy.

The [state structural speciality code](#) establishes “the minimum requirements to provide a reasonable level of safety, health, and general welfare through structural strength, means of egress facilities, stability, sanitation, adequate light and ventilation, energy conservation and safety to life and property from fire and other hazards...”. While some of the agricultural buildings covered by this proposed exemption are used for storing farm or forestry machinery and equipment, and/or used as a place for maintenance or repair, some are also used as a place for safety meetings or places where employees take breaks and lunch.

We would like to hear from experts at the Building Codes Division before making any changes to a law that is meant to ensure buildings occupied by people are safe. It is unclear whether this proposal would also apply to structures where agricultural work happens over long periods of time, such as assembly work, dairying, sorting, packing etc. This proposal should also clarify it does not impact agricultural labor housing.

With these important considerations in mind, we strongly urge this committee to get clarity from the Building Codes Division before voting on this bill to ensure farmworkers are as safe in their worksites as any other worker. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Martha Sonato, Oregon Law Center

Ira Cuello-Martinez, PCUN

Kate Suisman, Northwest Workers' Justice Project

Catie Thiesen, OR AFL-CIO