

Submitter: Joshua StrombergWojcik

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Labor and Business

Measure: SB592

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Joshua Stromberg-Wojcik, and I am the pastor of El Camino de Emaús Lutheran Church in Burlington, WA as well as the secretary for Farm Worker Ministry Northwest. I grew up in Happy Valley, OR and have also lived in Eugene, OR.

We strongly encourage your support of SB 592 to improve workplace safety and health in Oregon. We have a number of farm workers who are members of El Camino, so I know firsthand the challenges farmworkers face here in the northwest, and their vulnerability to the dangers of the workplace.

SB 592 improves current safety and health practices with the goal to make all workplaces in Oregon safer. Currently, Oregon OSHA can assess a penalty when an injury or a death occurs as a result of a serious safety and health violation like a lack of training, equipment maintenance or supervision, preventable exposure to toxins, or even lack of safety gear like harnesses or hard hats.

However, Oregon OSHA penalties for these serious violations continue to be the lowest in the nation. In 2021 the average Oregon penalty for an injury that resulted in a serious violation was just over \$600- 5 times less than the national average. And from an inspection due to a workplace death, Oregon's average penalty was just over \$1000--over 10 times less than the national OSHA penalty average. These low penalties mean that the worst actors can commit multiple safety and health violations before the fine is significant enough to incentivize a change in behavior.

SB 592 also strengthens inspections-- which we know are also an imperative component in making workplaces safer. SB 592 would trigger a comprehensive whole-workplace inspection if 3 or more violations occur within a year or an occupational death occurs. Currently, estimations suggest that it would take Oregon OSHA 112 years to inspect every workplace in Oregon. SB 592 ensures that when a death has occurred, a full inspection is done, checking that there are not related or wholly separate safety and health issues that could lead to another injury or death at the same workplace.

Unfortunately, we know that injuries and deaths take place across every industry in Oregon. This is certainly true among agricultural workers here in the Skagit Valley of Washington. Honesto Silva Ibarra, a 28-year-old, married, father of three had come

to Washington for the blueberry harvest in 2017 as a temporary worker from Mexico. He had complained of a bad headache to staff for at least two consecutive days and they did not offer any support. After feeling really bad, he decided on his own to go to Harborview Medical Center and paid everything out of pocket because the company wouldn't take him there. Workers raised concerns about undercooked food and policies that discourage sick days. Ibarra later died. Similar things can and do happen in Oregon. It is OSHA's charge to protect workers by providing resources to employers and workers, inspecting workplaces, and rectifying employer mistakes or negligence. SB 592 improves reporting, strengthens penalties, and helps make sure that more workplaces are safe before another injury or death occurs.

Workers of color are disproportionately impacted. The Latino fatality rate increased again to 4.5 per 100,000 workers in 2020, 32% greater than the national average; that marks a 15% increase over the past decade. Of those who died in 2020, 65% were immigrants.

Every one worker death or injury from a preventable workplace hazard is too many and ultimately hurts the economy and our communities at large. Please do everything you can to make workplaces as safe as possible in Oregon. We encourage your support of SB 592. Thank you.

Pastor Josh Stromberg-Wojcik