



March 8th, 2023

Co-Chair Woods, Co-Chair Gomberg and members of the committee,

My name is Liz Marquez and I am submitting testimony on behalf of PCUN, Oregon's Farmworker Union. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 5515 relating to the Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) 2023-2025 budget.

At PCUN, we work to empower farmworkers and Latinx working families to improve their working conditions through community building, organizing, and policy advocacy. PCUN has 8,000 members and the majority live and work in the Mid-Willamette Valley, Oregon's vibrant agricultural region. PCUN was founded by 80 farmworkers to fight against exploitation at work and the effects that come with that. Since then, our members have fought to ensure that important victories such as raising the minimum wage, earned sick leave, and safe working conditions, protect all of Oregon's working families, including farmworkers. These policies are crucial to building an economy that works for everyone, not just special interests.

Despite farmworkers being labeled as essential workers during the many crises across our state, the workers we represent are often treated the opposite. We frequently receive calls from workers who have been denied sick pay, have unpaid wages, are experiencing harassment and often fear reporting violations due to fear of retaliation. When workers turn to us, we work together with our partners, Centro de Servicios para Campesinos and the Northwest Workers Justice Project, to serve as a bridge between the worker and the agency, and support the worker in moving through the process to submit their claim and gather the necessary information to complete their case. However, due to limited resources and an increasing workload, our state agencies do not have the resources to investigate claims in a timely manner. This has profound impacts for workers living paycheck to paycheck such as our farmworker members who are already some of the lowest paid workers in the state<sup>1</sup>.

We support SB 5515 because we know BOLI's budget is critical to workers in Oregon. This budget request would provide much needed resources and capacity to our state agency to ensure that workers rights are protected and when there are violations, the agency is able to investigate and enforce our labor laws by holding employers accountable in a timely manner.

We believe the following will provide much needed relief for Oregon's workforce and our state agency:

- Position authority for two investigators and one support position in Wage and Hour: wage and hour investigators and their support staff do critical work in ensuring that complaints are addressed in a timely manner. For many Oregonians living

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/farming-fishing-and-forestry/agricultural-workers.htm#tab-5>

paycheck-to-paycheck, the timely resolution of these matters has a profound impact. Because wage claims involve employees not being paid for their work, the timely resolution of these claims can mean the difference between an Oregonian making rent -- or not.

- Funding for two mediator positions: to immediately address the increase and backlog in cases. BOLI's mediation model has resolved more than 200 cases over an 18th month period. This process will free up important agency prosecutorial capacity and help parties come to a resolution more easily.
- Public records support position: transparency in public records is essential for advocacy organizations, and is a fundamental right for all Oregonians. Staffing the positions that fulfill these records requests is essential in meeting the time requirements under public records laws.
- Grant programs supporting registered apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs: allows BOLI to collaborate with Oregon businesses and labor organizations to create opportunities for priority populations to become part of a well-trained and in-demand workforce. BOLI's support to these programs is a powerful demonstration of our state's commitment to the next generation of skilled and trained workers in Oregon.

BOLI is a critical agency to Oregon and their budget request demonstrates their commitment to serving workers. For many Oregonians living paycheck to paycheck, a timely resolution of these matters has a profound impact in their lives and their families. We urge your support on SB 5515.

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PCUN