



Martha Sonato
Legislative Advocate
971.801.5031
msonato@oregonlawcenter.org
522 SW Fifth Avenue, Suite 812
Portland, OR 97204

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Testimony in support of HB 3124
04/03/2023

Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Hartman and Owens, members of the committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 3124, the Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security Package and specifically the following provision: Safety Net Resources for Disaster Relief of Agricultural Workers. This provision sets aside \$10 million for direct payments to farmworkers who lose income due to drought-related issues such as heat or smoke.

OLC's mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. Many of our clients have incomes at or below 125% of the federal poverty level, and work hard to provide the necessities for themselves and their family.

One of the low-income communities we serve is the migrant and seasonal farmworker population. Farmworkers in our state are a critical workforce and contribute in immense ways to our robust agricultural industry, and the vibrancy of our state. Unfortunately, farmworkers encounter significant challenges to achieving economic security and prosperity. Farmworkers earn an estimated \$29,630 in annual wages and often struggle to get by.¹ They also experience housing insecurity, no access or lack of access to healthcare, language barriers, and are disproportionately impacted by extreme weather conditions.

Over the last couple of years, Oregon has experienced more and more extreme weather events, from several heat waves that prompted a state of emergency to ice storms and intense wildfires.² The proposed \$10 million in disaster relief assistance to farmworkers is a critical investment that helps farmworkers, and their families stay afloat during these emergencies.

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

² <https://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2022/07/26/brown-declares-emergency-as-triple-digit-heat-boils-oregon-next-5-days/65383138007/>

We appreciate the legislature's proactive efforts in 2021 to address the disproportionate climate impacts on farmworkers by passing a \$100 million drought package with a \$10 million in disaster relief payment allocation to farmworkers. Those funds were a lifeline and when farmworkers were unable to work because of extreme heat or smoke, they could rely on this fund to put food on the table.

With a reinvestment of \$10 million to the Climate Change Fund, we are protecting the workers who face the most risks posed by the climate crisis. The dangers of the climate crisis are not evenly distributed. Many agricultural workers are immigrants, Indigenous, or Latinx and low-income. Prioritizing relief to the members of our communities who are most impacted is key to developing an equitable response to climate disasters. This is a cornerstone of environmental justice. Agricultural workers do essential work that feeds and supports our entire state, and they need safe workplaces and fair pay.

Please vote 'Yes' on HB 3124 with the \$10 million investment into the Climate Change Fund for farmworkers who lost income due to heat or smoke. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Martha Sonato