

To: House Committee on Labor and Workplace Standards
From: Martha Sonato, Oregon Law Center
Re: Strong support for [HB 3193](#)
Date: 03/10/2025

Chair Grayber, Vice-Chairs Elmer and Munoz, and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of HB 3193. This Act directs the Oregon Health Authority to create a permanent disaster relief program to provide financial support to agricultural workers who lose income due to a qualifying disaster.

Our mission is to achieve justice for Oregon’s low-income communities by providing high-quality civil legal services. We have a dedicated farmworker program that serves agricultural workers across the state—offering free legal support, connecting workers to vital resources, and advocating for their rights. Based on our extensive experience working with farmworker clients, we see this proposal as a necessary support system for agricultural workers and their families when a qualifying disaster disrupts their ability to work.

The Challenges Agricultural Workers Face

In recent years, Oregon has experienced more extreme weather events—from heat waves that prompted a state of emergency to ice storms and intense wildfires.¹ In response, in 2021 the legislature appropriated \$10 million to provide relief to agricultural workers who missed work due to extreme heat and smoke. This investment was part of a larger \$100 million funding package aimed at communities hit hardest, including a \$40 million investment in an agricultural forgivable disaster loan program.²

We were especially glad to see a specific investment directed toward agricultural workers. That \$10 million was an acknowledgment that agricultural workers are a critical part of our state’s workforce. Even a single severe weather event or disaster can significantly destabilize an agricultural worker and their family—especially when they are already earning an average annual wage of \$34,790.³ To put this into perspective, the

¹ <https://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/news/2022/07/26/brown-declares-emergency-as-triple-digit-heat-boils-oregon-next-5-days/65383138007/>

² <https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/senatedemocrats/Documents/PR%20-%20SB%20892%20Drought%20Relief%20Package.pdf>

³ [https://www.bls.gov/ooh/farming-fishing-and-forestry/agricultural-workers.htm#:~:text=Note:%20All%20Occupations%20includes%20all%20occupations%20in%20the%20U.S.%20Economy.&text=and%20Wage%20Statistics-,The%20median%20annual%20wage%20for%20agricultural%20workers%20was%20\\$34%2C790%20in,percent%20earned%20more%20t](https://www.bls.gov/ooh/farming-fishing-and-forestry/agricultural-workers.htm#:~:text=Note:%20All%20Occupations%20includes%20all%20occupations%20in%20the%20U.S.%20Economy.&text=and%20Wage%20Statistics-,The%20median%20annual%20wage%20for%20agricultural%20workers%20was%20$34%2C790%20in,percent%20earned%20more%20t)

The Oregon Law Center’s mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities in Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services.



Oregon Law Center

WORKING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE JUSTICE FOR LOW INCOME OREGONIANS

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state's living wage for a single adult is \$25.16 per hour.⁴ This equates to an annual income of approximately \$52,933 with full-time employment (40 hours per week). A \$34,790 income is already low, leaving agricultural workers and their families in an impossible situation when they are unable to work due to circumstances beyond their control.

Why HB 3193 Matters

Prioritizing relief for those most affected by climate disasters is essential to creating an equitable response. This bill would provide critical support to a workforce that is particularly vulnerable to severe weather events and disasters due to the nature of their jobs. We appreciate the bill's definition of "qualifying disaster," which includes drought, wildfire, earthquake, hurricane, flood, excessive heat, tornado, winter storm, snowstorm, freeze, hail, smoke, tsunami, volcanic eruption, or other adverse weather events ([Sec. 1, subsection \(1\)\(b\)\(A\)](#)). Historically, the legislature has focused on extreme heat and wildfire smoke as qualifiers for worker support, but this broader definition accounts for other climate and disaster-related events that may impact workers in the future.

Good for the Agricultural Industry, Good for the Economy, Good for Workers

When agricultural workers can support themselves and their families, we see less workforce turnover, a more stable agricultural economy, and stronger communities. Agricultural workers, like all of us, spend their earnings on housing, transportation, food, and medical care. By providing this support, we strengthen their safety net, which in turn benefits the broader community.

We strongly urge this committee to support agricultural workers by passing HB 3193 to establish a permanent agricultural worker disaster relief program.

Sincerely,
Martha Sonato
Oregon Law Center

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,Most%20work%20full%20time%2C%20and%20some%20work%20more%20than%2040,between%20jobs%20can%20cause%20stress.
⁴ <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/41>

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