

March 11, 2025

To: House Committee on Labor and Workplace Standards

From: Walla Walla Nursery Co

RE: HB 2548 Agricultural Workforce Labor Standards Board

My name is Lorne Blackman, owner of Walla Walla Nursery Company, and I'm writing in opposition to HB 2548. The proposal will make farming harder, riskier and more expensive. More farms will be driven out of business or just give up in Oregon's increasingly hostile ag-business environment. This harms not only farmers but the workers they employ. It's also bad for climate and consumers who, as Oregon farms are forced out, will have to pay inflated product and fuel costs to transport replacement products from distant locations with business friendlier environments.

The proposal implies farmers are Incapable and untrustworthy to make sound and equitable employment decisions without bureaucratic oversight.

It would force employers to justify a termination shifting the burden to them and escalating exposure to costly litigation – guilty until proven innocent - as we would need to defend ourselves against employment claims, even in situations resulting from adverse market conditions, yields, weather, or other events beyond their control.

The proposal subjects us to the whims of an unelected bureaucratic body staffed by individuals with perhaps nothing better to do than think up new burdens to impose on farms in the name of worker protection to justify their positions.

Oregon's state agencies have adopted numerous harmful regulations in the last five years with little to no accountability for their actions. How much worse to empower unelected officials to set wages and safety rules going far beyond current protections. Farmers and anyone living in the real world understand how devastating this unaccountable regulatory model will be.

The proposal unfairly targets agriculture separately from other industries, unjustly depriving owners of the basic right of at-will employment and the ability to make their own staffing decisions. Farms should not be forced to keep individuals who do not meet performance expectations or may harm team morale where other industries retain the fundamental right to at-will employment!

We are not hostile or indifferent to their employees' well-being. In the real world, the vast majority of farmers see our workers as partners in our joint enterprise. Our workers are happy and enjoy positive, individual relationships with their employer. Their voices are heard leaving them little or no incentive to unionize or demand this sort of outside intervention.

It's hard not to see the influence of Marxist class perspectives at work portraying farm owners as oppressors and farm workers as oppressed.

Farmers are already teetering under the weight of regulatory burdens, labor shortages, depressed prices, supply cost inflation, and the elimination of the overtime exemption on seasonal business. Where will it end?

Oregon's farmers long for a government that treats us as a valued partner and not an enemy. The need to defend ourselves constantly against such egregious regulation is costly, exhausting, and demoralizing.

Please oppose HB2548!!

Lorne Blackman

Walla Walla Nursery

Milton-Freewater OR 97862

509-520-6851