

Submitter: Andy Kraemer

On Behalf Of: Kraemer Farms, LLC

Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace

Standards

Measure, Appointment or

Topic: HB2548

Members of the Committee,

My name is Andy Kraemer. I am the 3rd generation on our family farm in Mount Angel and hope my four kids can be a part of the 4th generation. That likely won't be an option if this bill passes. We farm winegrapes, seed crops, hazelnuts, vegetables, Christmas trees and grain crops. I work closely with my father, siblings, uncles and cousins to keep our farm running. We have seasonal and year-round employees. Some of the year-round employees have worked at our farm for over forty years and are like family to us. We've faced many challenges in recent years including but not limited to death in the immediate family, fires, drought, heat domes, ice storms, higher interest rates, declining demand/pricing for the products we grow along with more regulations and wage increases. HB 2548 may be the final straw that breaks us.

I'm asking you to oppose HB 2548 because it threatens my family's ability to keep farming. Oregon already has some of the highest labor costs in the country, and after several tough years, we can't afford more regulations and wage increases. We feel like we are inside a hay press being squeezed from all directions to the point where our farm will cease to exist.

This bill would give unelected bureaucrats the power to set wages and safety rules that go far beyond current protections, adding more regulatory burden to small farms like ours. Farmers know how devastating this regulatory model is. Oregon's state agencies have adopted very harmful regulations in the last five years with little to no accountability for their actions. This board would be no different; its members aren't even elected.

HB 2548 unfairly targets agriculture by taking away at-will employment, meaning I wouldn't be able to make necessary staffing decisions without the risk of costly lawsuits. One claim can cost tens of thousands of dollars or more. I also don't believe that farms should be forced keep employees who may not meet performance expectations or adapt to the demands of the job. All other sectors in Oregon would be at-will, but farms—whose employment needs are impacted by weather, yields, trade, pests, diseases, etc.—would not. Not only is that unfair, but it will likely result in job loss, not job security.

This bill doesn't help workers or consumers; it just makes farming harder and more expensive. I have already had to manage hours to comply with agricultural overtime, and HB 2548 could force me to make tough operational choices like reducing my workforce, changing crops, automating, or selling the operation.

I just saw the -2 amendment, and it creates a very biased Board. The proposed Board would rubber stamp any new regulation - regardless of farmers' ability to pay. It requires training for all employees and new hires but only allows unions to provide it; I don't understand how that would work for a seasonal workforce. Also, the new amendment allows workers to claim emotional damages and does not even allow farm employers a fair defense, as only plaintiffs' attorneys could recover their fees. It's a recipe for needless and costly litigation against farm families.

We are blessed to live in the Willamette Valley with fertile soils, water resources, and generational knowledge that have allowed farmers here to grow many of the roughly 220 crops grown in this state.

If this bill passes, generations of blood, sweat and tears of current and prior generations may be wasted. The lands in this Valley and across the state may be sold to outside investors without a tie to the land or local economies. Local businesses that depend on agriculture in small towns and cities across the state will suffer and tax revenues will follow. Agriculture is the lifeblood of Oregon's rural economy. If we lose Agriculture, I'm afraid Oregon's rural economy will wither away and die without it.

I urge you to vote no against this punitive bill to protect local farms and jobs and the future of Agriculture in Oregon.