

Testimony in Opposition of HB 2548

Chair Grayber members of the committee.

My name is Helle Ruddenklau and my husband and I farm about 1,100 acres in Polk and Yamhill Counties and I oppose HB 2548.

We started farming when we were only twenty-three years old. Right from the beginning, we would hire additional help when needed. We have provided a "first job" for numerous high school students, and later full-time employment as well. For a while we had a trucking operation and had truck drivers, farm employees, a caregiver for our children while I worked on the farm and part time office help. Through all that I was the HR department. I would spend countless hours making sure we were in compliance with whatever rules we were supposed to follow and doing right by our employees.

We transitioned out of the trucking enterprise, and after a few years we were down to only one full time employee. When he decided to go trucking by himself, we needed to reevaluate our business. While it was daunting, we decided for the first time in thirty years to farm without hiring any employees. It is not easy. My husband works all day, every day. I have some more flexibility, the reason I'm able to be here today, but still put in plenty of hours. As our children grew up, they have helped as needed. They have seen the hours we put in, and I expect that is one of the reasons they have decided not to follow in our footsteps.

We can keep this going for a while, but we are getting older and some years down the line we will again have to reevaluate. I'm sorry to say, that hiring employees is not under consideration. While it would make our lives easier, the rules, regulations and costs imposed by the state make it something I do not wish to return to. For a family farm like ours, hiring employees, is now so fraught with risk that it is not worth it.

We provided first jobs for teenagers, and part time jobs for retirees. We would love to still do that both for their sake and ours. But under the current climate it is not worth is, and this bill would only make that situation worse.