

Dear Chair Grayber, Vice-Chairs Elmer and Muñoz, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Cynthia Ramirez, I live in Salem and I am writing in STRONG support of HB 2548 to create a Farmworker Standards Board in Oregon.

There are over 72,000 Oregon farmworkers, who put food on our tables and contribute over \$6.4B to our state's economy, yet they experience poor working conditions and earn an average of just \$34,500 annually. Oregon's agriculture industry relies heavily on immigrant labor. Most farmworkers are immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, and Central America, many of whom speak an Indigenous language. Workers who provide to Oregon's economy, culture, and well-being of the state.

HB 2548 will give historically excluded workers the ability to have a voice in setting industry standards with real enforcement power and accountability for the first time EVER. The board will ensure access to fair wages, safe conditions, and protection from retaliation. Basic human rights that most workers in other industries are granted.

Oregon has a long history of racism dating back to before the territory even became a U.S state. Farmworkers' voices have been ignored for far too long. Farmworkers do some of the most important work in our state and are excluded from basic protections. They are skilled workers and deserve the same rights as any other worker across the country. Every time advocates have pushed for stronger protections for farmworkers, they've been met with intense opposition. For example, in 2023, the Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregon Association of Nurseries, Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers, Oregon Dairy Farm Association along with multiple other groups submitted testimony in opposition to SB 907, the right to refuse dangerous work. How is it possible they could oppose a bill that protects the safety of farmworkers while they claim they support them?

It is important to highlight that three representatives in the House Committee on Labor and Workplace Standards, who spoke in great detail about how much "they love their employees" happened to be excused from voting on this bill. Isn't that ironic since they talked about how much they care for their workers. They should have been the first ones to vote AYE to protect the workers they say they love so much. I am tired of hearing excuses and hearing that it's "impossible" to give basic human rights. Is it impossible or do they simply not care about farmworkers because of their underlying racism? Our farmworkers aren't asking for much. They want a liveable wage, a safe working environment, transparency, and the right to speak out without fear of retaliation.

Cities and states across the country have proven that workforce standards boards work. These boards bring workers together with industry and public representatives to set meaningful standards, with real enforcement power to ensure accountability. From New

York's farm laborers to Minnesota's nursing home staff to Seattle's domestic workers, these boards give workers the voice and protections they deserve and give our communities the essential food we need. This board will finally provide a space for farmworkers to speak up about the injustices they face. A space for conversation among employees and employers.

My question is, why are farmers so against this? Is it because the cruelties our farmworkers face will finally come to light in a public space? Is it because the reality of farmers not meeting current standards will be exposed? If they have nothing to fear and believe their farms are operating ethically, they should not be worried about the board. If anything, the board will be beneficial to farmers across Oregon because the board would level the playing field across the state to ensure all farmers and farmworkers are treated fairly. A Farmworker Standards Board is designed to be a collaborative space between employers, farmworkers, and state labor agencies to set standards that make sense for the agricultural industry.

I urge you to vote YES on HB 2548 to create a Farmworker Standards Board and give farmworkers the ability to use their voice and set meaningful standards for the agriculture industry.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Ramirez