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**To:** House Committee on Labor and Workplace Standards  
**From:** Martha Sonato, Legislative Advocate  
**Re:** Support for HB 2548  
**Date:** 03/12/2025

**Chair Grayber, Vice-Chairs Elmer and Muñoz, 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 2548](#), which would establish an Agricultural Workforce Standards Board.

At OLC, we have a dedicated farmworker program that provides free legal support, connects workers to vital resources, and advocates for their rights. With decades of experience serving Oregon’s farmworker communities, we strongly support the creation of this board.

### **The Need**

Oregon’s agricultural economy depends on farmworkers, yet the very workforce sustaining this multibillion-dollar industry continues to operate under labor protections that don’t go far enough, lower wages, and hazardous working conditions. Despite being the foundation of our food system, farmworkers remain excluded from key labor rights, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and unsafe workplaces. From a historical standpoint, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA)—cornerstones of worker protections—were designed to exclude farmworkers, denying them the same rights afforded to other workers, including collective bargaining.

While farmworkers have only recently gained many basic rights after decades of exclusion, such as overtime pay, significant gaps remain—for example, lack of collective bargaining rights. They still face workplace hazards, retaliation, and substandard conditions. A Workforce Standards Board would ensure farmworkers have an institutional **voice** in shaping the policies that impact them while addressing ongoing issues of fairness, safety, and economic security.

### **Why an Agricultural Workforce Standards Board?**

Because farmworkers lack collective bargaining rights, an industry-specific board with rulemaking authority is necessary to balance the relationship between workers and employers. [HB 2548-2](#) proposes an 11-member board, housed under BOLI, with:

- Equal representation of employers and worker/worker representatives
- Participation from state agencies responsible for worker protections, health, and safety

The board would review wages, working conditions, and labor protections for farmworkers in Oregon, identifying gaps in current laws and establishing minimum recommended

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standards. Equally important, it would ensure workers have a voice in shaping fair and safe labor policies. State agencies like OSHA and BOLI would hold a key role in enforcing these protections, providing data, and supporting the board's efforts to improve industry practices.

## Key Components

- The board **establishes recommended standards** but does not directly implement or enforce them. Instead, it must petition the appropriate state agency—such as the Bureau of Labor and Industries—to adopt regulations. Agencies may reject a standard only if it exceeds their authority, is unenforceable, impractical, or unlawful.
- The board **cannot alter overtime pay requirements or mandate paid benefits** but can set minimum wages, piece-rate standards, and workplace conditions, such as rest breaks.
- Many farmworkers have expressed the need for **better training protocols for both supervisors and non-supervisory staff** to ensure fair and effective workplace management. Worker's report experiencing unfair treatment and disregard for their rights by supervisory and non-supervisory staff. By improving education on workplace protections, both under existing laws and through the board's recommendations, the agricultural industry can create a healthier, and safer work environment.

## Worker Standards Boards: A Proven Model

Worker standards boards have been successfully implemented in other industries to address gaps in labor protections. Across the country, 13 wage boards currently exist, three of which have rulemaking authority, including:

- California Industrial Welfare Commission
- California Fast Food Council
- Minnesota Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board

## Conclusion

Farmworkers deserve a seat at the table to improve their wages, scheduling, and workplace conditions—especially regarding safety and health protections. The fact that farmworkers have gained some labor protections over time does not mean the work is done. Establishing a Workforce Standards Board is a critical step toward ensuring farmworkers receive the dignity, protections, and economic security they deserve.

We urge you to support HB 2548.

Sincerely,  
Martha Sonato  
Oregon Law Center

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