

Submitter:

Laura Lester

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

Senate Committee On Judiciary

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

SB703

I would ask our legislators to support this humane and forward-thinking legislation-- Senate Bill 703.

For the past four years I have worked as a volunteer with Western Farm Workers Association in Hillsboro, helping their members find financial help for groceries, rent and utilities. These are the same farm workers who plant, tend and harvest the food which sustains us. We know how important they are to the wellbeing of every Oregon citizen and how their labor is such a critical part of our state's economy. Without them, our agricultural sector would be severely crippled. Yet, they struggle to afford those things basic to wellbeing--rent, food and utilities, often withholding payment to one and falling into arrears on another expense. They rarely have time or the economic wherewithal to think about anything more than the most basic issues of life.

According to PICUN (Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noreste--the farm workers union), there are over 72,000 Oregon farmworkers who put food on our tables and contribute over \$6 billion to our state's economy. Our native born population generally does not seek the hard work of farm labor. Most farmworkers are immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, and Central America. This bill would give farm workers greater physical security in these uncertain times as they build our state's economy.

While our nation as a whole has not treated these important workers fairly, Oregon in recent years has done much better and passing this bill would build on that foundation. I am proud that with Illinois, Oregon leads the nation in welcoming and protecting our immigrant neighbors.

I would ask you to build on our recent proud record of supporting immigrants pass this legislation.