Speech presented on behalf of Willamette Valley Workers Benefit Council by WBC Delegate Alicia Chavez to the Oregon State Legislature Committee on Consumer Protection and Government Effectiveness of the Oregon State Legislature on March 19, 2015

My name is Alicia Chavez and I came here today from Hillsboro. I am here as a delegate of the Willamette Valley Workers Benefit Council and a member of Western Farm Workers Association. I have been a volunteer and member for 14 years. I have worked as a low-paid service worker my entire life and my husband and son are landscapers.

Thank you for listening to the voices of your constituents; I hope your will put our words into action.

On behalf of thousands of farm, nursery, landscape, restaurant, and childcare workers, as well as the disabled and elderly, I implore the state legislature to go further than HB 2599 and pass a law to prevent the utility companies from shutting off power for <u>anyone</u> earning 200% of poverty or below and to waive our disconnect fees.

I am here today representing many families that are struggling to survive. Most of us earn minimum wage and are unable to find full time work during the winter months. We often have to decide between paying our utility bills and feeding our families. Our economic conditions are getting worse and poverty is on the rise.

Our monthly electric bills range from 150 to 300 dollars, we already cannot afford to pay our bills and many of us constantly face utility shutoffs. PGE has raised their rates nearly 60% since 2000 and have stated they plan to apply for rate increases yearly for the next 10 years. If we can't pay our bills now, how are we going to pay higher bills when they raise the rates?

On behalf of 13,000 low-paid workers in Washington County, I call upon the Legislature to stop the utilities from shutting off our power during the winter and insure the reconnection of low-income residents whose heat and lights have been turned off with payment plans based on what households can afford.

Thank you.