



Testimony in Support of House Bill 2358

March 8, 2021

House Committee on Business and Labor

Russell Lum

Good afternoon Chair Holvey, Vice Chairs Bonham and Grayber, and members of the committee. My name is Russell Lum, I am a political organizer for Oregon Nurses Association. We represent 15,000 nurses — including RNs and advanced practice nurses — and allied health workers. I submit to you today that Oregon Nurses Association and the Nurse Practitioners of Oregon strongly support House Bill 2358.

Overtime pay for hourly workers going beyond the forty-hour workweek is good policy. The legislative and regulatory tradition of exempting agricultural work from otherwise broad labor protections has been flawed, on numerous grounds. As a labor union and professional association, ONA pursues just wages for workers and knows the importance of fair compensation, in both livelihood terms and respect-on-the-job terms. Nurses want fellow workers to see that their jobs add up to be able to pay the bills and be afforded dignity. Nurses also know that circumstances of poverty are a health determinant to a substantive degree. That is, the health care that is our members' passion and role to provide looks often like a harder or easier road to wellness for a patient based on their wealth, class, and financial stressors.

Another factor ONA wishes to name is that farmwork is not randomly underpaid/over-exploited, it is over-exploited because farmwork is done by people of color. Farmworkers are in a vulnerable position; they have historically been a population that power structures have found it convenient and easy to exempt. The call to bring about equity in Oregon, which ONA joins in making and working on, demands this be repaired, and without delay.

Finally, as you know Oregon's nurses were the responders to multiple public health emergencies in recent months, one of which being wildfire. To deny farmworkers overtime pay over and against the reasons discussed above would be an injustice. To do so moreover after a period where they went to work in hazardous air quality (with inadequate employer or legal protections) would be all the more puzzling. Oregon nurses are looking out for workers' health in historically difficult times. The legislature can help with the passage of this overtime law for agricultural workers, so I urge the Committee to advance House Bill 2358.