



To: Members of the House Business and Labor Committee
From: Julia DeGraw, Oregon League of Conservation Voters
Date: March 8, 2021

RE: Support for HB 2358 – Farmworker overtime.

Chair Holvey, Vice-Chairs Bonham and Grayber, and Members of the House Business and Labor Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on HB 2358. On behalf of our thousands of members and supporters in Oregon, we would like to register the Oregon League of Conservation Voters strong support of farmworker overtime.

The Oregon League of Conservation Voters (OLCV) works within local and state governments to demand clean air and water, healthy forests and wildlife, and a renewable energy future for all Oregonians. Alongside our members, we take political action to stand up for Oregon's people and places. OLCV coordinates both the Oregon Conservation Network and the Central Oregon Conservation Network. These environmental coalitions have helped create lasting change throughout our state, including passing Oregon's first renewable energy standard, establishing marine reserves, reducing toxic chemicals in children's products, and saving the Elliott State Forest.

OLCV supports HB 2358 because it guarantees overtime pay to agricultural workers after 40 hours in a workweek at one and one-half times the employees's regular rate of pay, including farmworkers who are paid by piece-rate (how many crops they produce) or hourly. Oregon legislators would be joining California, Washington, New York, Minnesota, and Hawaii in passing this crucial pro-worker legislation.

It is past time that we act to ensure farmworkers are afforded the same rights available to a majority of other workers since the Federal Labor Standards Act of 1938. The fact that this has not yet happened is due to the racist legacy of excluding farm workers from the Federal Labor Standards Act for the purpose of maintaining the social and economic control of these people. People who were predominantly black at the time the act was passed and now a majority of whom are from Latin America have been systematically excluded from labor rights they deserve. OLCV is committed to dismantling racism in the State of Oregon and passing HB 2358 is a step in the right direction.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has taught us to stop taking things for granted, particularly to start recognizing and appropriately compensating our frontline workers. Farmworkers are the definition of a frontline worker—everyone has to eat. Through natural disasters like wildfire, ice storms, and through a deadly global pandemic, farmworkers unfailingly show up to make sure there's food on our tables. Yet



they are consistently underpaid while expected to work in these dangerous conditions. To say the least, agricultural workers deserve to be paid fairly for their labor.

Farmworkers under the current system are deeply underpaid and exploited for their cheap labor. On average, according to the National Agricultural Workers Survey, individual farmworkers earn \$15,000 to \$17,499 per year and families are estimated to make between \$20,000 and \$25,000 a year. We know that those wages are completely unacceptable in 2021. People cannot live in dignity on those wages.

Passing HB 2358 will help ensure the some 174,000 migrant and seasonal farmworkers, and relatives, that contribute greatly to Oregon's multi-billion dollar agricultural industry can be paid more fairly for their labor. They are, in so many ways, the backbone of our agricultural industry and should be fairly compensated for their labor. Farmworkers deserve economic stability that has been denied to them by excluding them from basic labor standards such as minimum wage, collective bargaining rights, and overtime pay. We know that when working class people get increased pay that it will increase consumer spending, adding an additional boon to the local economy, particularly for local businesses and rural communities.

The same systems that exploit farmworkers are those that exploit the natural environment. We recognize at OLCV that we have to fight all forms of exploitation and urge you to vote yes on HB 2358 to ensure farmworkers in Oregon are adequately paid for their labor.

Sincerely,

Julia DeGraw

Coalition Director

Oregon League of Conservation Voters