I strongly urge you to oppose HB 2205. As written, the bill would allow for any environmental group or other organization or person to file a lawsuit against business for perceived violations of Oregon laws. While earlier iterations have been focused on wage and hour claims, this bill has no limit on the types of lawsuits that could be brought, from water law to employment law to traffic violations.

As a farmer and business owner, this bill puts my operations at risk. There is reason that state agencies are charged with enforcing state laws – laws are rarely clear on their face, and there's significant rulemaking and interpretation that agencies have to conduct as they enforce laws. This would remove the nuance of those decisions from agencies with deep expertise in the laws they administer, and place them in our already overburdened court system, where judges deal with cases ranging from criminal law to fraud to child support on a daily basis. Judges are not – nor should they be – subject matter experts on the myriad of Oregon laws that agencies routinely enforce.

This bill is worse than the federal citizen suit provisions – which environmental groups have used to make millions – because it would allow a direct cause of action against individual farmers and ranchers, not just the agency that the group didn't feel was correctly applying the law. It would also allow the plaintiff to collect a portion of the civil penalties associated with the violation if their lawsuit is successful. At the federal level, this monetization of lawsuits has created a robust incentive to "sue and settle" knowing that it's often cheaper to settle a lawsuit than to litigate claims to completion. Please don't open my farm up to endless litigation we cannot afford. Unlike these groups, we do not have attorneys on staff. One baseless lawsuit could easily cost me my business.

This bill would have an enormous impact on farms and ranches statewide, both as written and if narrowed to wage and hour claims. I urge you to oppose this bill.