



Oregon's Farmworker Union

February 24, 2021

Chair Power, Vice-Chair Wallan, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 2205, the Just Enforcement Act.

Since the 1980's, members of PCUN have fought to ensure that important victories - raising wages, earned sick leave, and safe working conditions – protect all of Oregon's working families, including farmworkers. These policies are crucial to building an economy that works for everyone, not just special interests.

At PCUN, we represent Oregon's farmworkers and low wage Latinx workers. We support HB 2205 because we know that in order for these laws to protect our most vulnerable workers, we must ensure that they are effectively enforced.

In the past year, we've praised farm workers as heroes and deemed them essential during the many crises across our state. However the workers we represent are often treated as the opposite. We frequently receive calls from workers who have been denied sick pay, unpaid wages, harassment, and egregious health violations and are looking for somewhere to turn. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted even more the need for enforcement of labor laws already on the books to ensure all workers are safe and protected in their workplace.

We believe farmworkers and low wage workers should be able to speak up at work and enforce their workplace rights when laws are being violated. HB 2205 is an innovative policy that would bring in enforcement dollars to BOLI to hold bad employers accountable and protect our workers.

HB 2205 has two important provisions that empower vulnerable workers to get the support they need to bring serious workplace violations to light. One worker can file a whistleblower enforcement action on behalf of all coworkers impacted by violations - so a citizen who doesn't have to fear immigration-related retaliation can step forward on behalf of undocumented coworkers. Or workers can designate community organizations like PCUN to bring the case for them.

Immigrant workers in the Willamette Valley often approach PCUN for help addressing serious problems in their workplaces. They do this because they have trust in our organization, and they know they can count on us as a culturally specific liaison to receive justice for their grievance. At PCUN, we serve as a bridge between the worker and the

agency, and support the worker in moving through the bureaucratic process to submit their claim and be able to gather the necessary information to complete their case. We've heard loud and clear from workers fears of retaliation if they speak out and oftentimes feel confident and supported to go through a process to seek justice with someone they trust. Unfortunately, because of the budget cuts our hardworking enforcement agencies have suffered over the years, their ability to enforce our labor laws has decreased and so has the trust of our workers. That is why, apart from HB 2205 being a revenue generator, a key component in today's budget landscape, the ability and opportunity for workers to partner with trusted organizations, such as their union, to go through what would otherwise be a costly and arduous process, is a gamechanger and means that widespread abuse can be stopped earlier.

PCUN respectfully requests the committee to support HB 2205 to ensure that our enforcement agencies have sufficient capacity to create a culture of compliance with crucial workplace protections for all workers.

Thank you,

Martha Sonato
Political Director
PCUN