



February 1, 2022

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

On behalf of the American Association of University Women of Oregon (AAUW of OR), we express our strong support for House Bill 4002.

There is no question that farmworkers and their families will likely provide you the most compelling and personal stories about why this legislation should be enacted into law. These hard-working individuals who put food on our tables deserve to be treated as well as any worker here in Oregon.

We come to you from a different population - the one that has heretofore financially benefited from a system that doesn't reward farmworkers fairly. But we stand firmly in support of changing that status quo. It is only fair. It is only right. It is only just.

Many of us have had to grapple with understanding and acknowledging the many examples of historical racism that have permeated and continue to permeate our American culture. It is no accident, for example, that when the Social Security Act was passed, the two groups that were excluded from its coverage were agricultural and domestic workers who were also primarily African-American. Today most farm workers are immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean.

It is also case that women are often given the least desired, lowest paying jobs, are the first to be laid off, receive fewer opportunities to advance, and face a culture of discrimination in the workplace. In other words, female farm workers endure nearly all the issues male farm workers face, as well as some that are largely unique, such as sexual harassment, pregnancy and gender discrimination, and the extra responsibility of being the primary caregivers of children.<sup>1</sup>

Fairly paying the women who work as farmworkers will go a long way towards eliminating or at least ameliorating this exploitation. Equity in the workplace brings dignity as well as dollars.

How ironic it is that farm workers have been deemed "essential" and yet they cannot even be on a par with other workers. Their work is not only essential, but it is arduous and unappreciated. We must not only acknowledge these fundamental inequities, but we must do everything we can to rectify them.

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<sup>1</sup> Women in Agriculture, National Farm Worker Ministry, 2018, <https://nfwm.org/farm-workers/farm-worker-issues/womens-issues/>.

We would in fact have preferred that overtime pay be paid farmworkers now rather than have them wait for an extended phase-in period as is provided in House Bill 4002, but we need to at least initiate a process that addresses these inequities as soon as possible.

As Cesar Chavez most pithily stated, "A fight is never about grapes and lettuce. It's about people."

We urge the passage of House Bill 4002.

Respectfully Submitted,

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