

Testimony of Pat Dudley, Bethel Heights Vineyard, Salem

On House Bill 4002 – Agricultural Worker Overtime  
House Business and Labor Committee  
February 78 2021

Chair Holvey, Vice Chair Bonham, Vice Chair Grayber, and Representatives Boshart-Davis, Bynum, Cate, Evans, Fahey, George, and Salinas:

My name is Pat Dudley. I am a proprietor of Bethel Heights Vineyard in rural Polk County, and a former member of the State Board of Agriculture. My family founded our vineyard and winery over forty years ago, with the intention to create a multi-generational family farm and business. Our second generation is now active in our business, and we are currently planning the succession to our third generation.

A critical part of our success so far has been the long-term loyalty of our employees. We recognize that the skill and care that they bring to the work in our vineyard and winery is essential to the production of premium wine and the long-term sustainability of our business, so we have made it a priority to provide fair compensation and full benefits to all our employees, including those who work primarily in the vineyard.

Historically, since 1938, agricultural employees have been excluded from overtime pay protection, and we have taken this discriminatory practice for granted for way too long. Ironically, when our vineyard workers come into the winery to help with bottling and other jobs that require extra hands, they automatically receive overtime pay after 40 hours per week, but when they return to work in the field a different set of rules kicks in, long ago built into our payroll reporting system.

Correcting this unjust exclusion of agricultural workers from an essential benefit enjoyed by workers in every other sector of our economy is long overdue. We are making this correction immediately in our own payroll system.

I have heard anecdotes that suggest agricultural workers would be better off without overtime pay, and that perhaps they do not even want it, believing that their work hours would be reduced if their employers are forced to pay overtime. I do not agree with those arguments. I believe that the growing shortage of farm labor up and down the west coast means that farmers will find a way to offer fair compensation to keep the workers they need, or risk losing them to Washington and California where the transition to agricultural overtime pay has already begun.

Our family supports HB 4002 as written, although we are disappointed that the Bill calls for a five-year implementation while other states are moving more quickly. I encourage the House Business and Labor Committee to quickly approve House Bill 4002 as written and facilitate its passage into law.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

Pat Dudley  
Proprietor, Bethel Heights Vineyard