

Date: 2/8/22

To: House Committee on Business and Labor

From: Mikky Bell

Re: Support for Farmworker Overtime,

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

My name is Mikky Bell, I live in Portland and attend Portland State University. I am writing today in support of HB 4002 the Farmworker Overtime Bill and urge you to vote yes. Oregon farmworkers are the backbone of our society, delivering food to our tables through climate hazards and a pandemic. It is time that we affirm that farm workers be treated the same as any other workers and receive 1.5x pay for overtime work.

I personally care about this bill for many reasons. I currently work as a grocery store employee and was labeled an essential worker throughout the pandemic. I stand in solidarity with all workers who are exploited by a system that undervalues our labor in favor of revenue. Farmworkers were excluded from overtime in the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act due to Southern Democrats wanting to deny the overwhelming Black farmworker population fair compensation for their work. This exclusion was racist then and it is racist now. **Oregon can no longer stand to support racist business models.** How would you have voted in 1938?

Many in opposition to this bill say that it is not economically feasible for farmers to offer their workers overtime. The industrial agriculture business had benefited for far too long from the economic exploitation of its workers. I know this and so does Friends of Family Farmers, a nonprofit committed to advancing policies and programs that protect, promote and sustain resilient and economically viable community agricultural systems in Oregon. They understand that with the passing of overtime policies in California and Washington that there is a real danger of a worsening labor shortage in Oregon. Crops need to be picked or else they will spoil and not just anyone can do this work. Agricultural labor is skilled labor. Training new employees takes time and slows down production. **Better pay and working conditions lead to better employee retention and will help farms keep their skilled labor force here in Oregon.**

Working long hours myself during a pandemic, dealing with the economic stress of financially supporting myself and fearing that I may bring COVID home to my family I truly empathize with farmworkers and their families. Farmworkers are some of the lowest paid workers in Oregon with a median income of \$28,000 a year. To compensate for this low pay they work long hours, at times 16 hour days and 60 hour weeks. The effects of these long hours are numerous. To name a few: on the job injuries due to reduced cognition after 8 hours; limited family time, as low as an hour a week; chronic health impacts such as arthritis or heart conditions. Overtime pay

would fairly compensate workers for the increased risk associated with long hours as well as provide workers with more time outside of work.

In addition with more income workers will **spend more money at local businesses, be able to pay their rent more easily and put more money into rural Oregon economies.** This all contributes to the tax base of these communities which can help fund things like better schools, healthcare infrastructure, community open spaces, and maintenance. When rural communities have more money flowing through them, we all win.

The opposition to this bill from industrial agribusiness speaks to the fact that for so long they have taken advantage of exceptions and loopholes, like the Fair Labor Standards Act, to maintain a strong hold on the food system. I urge you to understand that the 5 year transition period in this bill is another way that industrial agribusiness is trying to delay justice for farmworkers. **With the over \$100 million in tax credit subsidy written into this bill there is already enough support for farmers to instate overtime without a transition period.** Not to mention that wages, including overtime pay, are already tax-deductible expenses for a business. Which means that Oregon would use General Fund resources to subsidize the agriculture industry for simply following the rules applicable to other Oregon businesses.

Please join me in supporting HB 4002 by voting yes and supporting the 174,000 migrant and seasonal farmworkers, and related family members, that contribute to Oregon's multi-billion dollar agricultural industry.

Sincerely
Mikky Bell