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Oregon Faith Movement

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Representative Holvey, Chair
House Committee on Business and Labor

Chair Holvey and Committee Members,

Committed to mutual respect and understanding, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) brings together communities of faith to learn, serve, and advocate for peace, justice, and the integrity of creation. EMO's membership includes 15 denominations and over 675 congregations, organizations, and interfaith partners, a collection of thousands of diverse members of the faith community all across the state. Our direct service programs serve hundreds of thousands of clients each year.

My name is A'Jay Scipio, and I serve as the program manager of EMO's Northeast Emergency Food Program (NEFP). **I am writing in support of HB 4002.** Since the COVID pandemic began, NEFP has served over one million individuals. We have seen many individuals from the agricultural sector, of which a high percentage are immigrants and refugees, who are working well over 40 hours a week doing back-breaking work and who still cannot adequately feed their families. HB 4002 is our opportunity to right this long-term wrong.

When striving to create responsible public policy and build just systems, we must always ask who bears the risk, who pays the price of existing law. **For roughly 85 years, it has been Oregon's agricultural workers who have borne the financial and physical cost of a law that denies overtime pay for our families, friends and neighbors that feed our communities.** At EMO, we have witnessed firsthand how hard they must work to put food on all of our tables, as well as to provide for their own families.

Farmworkers are some of Oregon's most important workers and produce the food that sustains the life of us all, yet they remain some of the lowest paid workers in Oregon with a median income of \$28,000 per year. This is less than a third of Oregon's median income of \$92,000. Our farmworkers deserve wages that affirm their basic dignity and respect.

Farmworkers have shown up for Oregon both as the climate changes - leading to increasingly dangerous working conditions, such as last year's extreme heat waves, wildfires, and ice storms - and through the pandemic, which highlighted the extent to which Oregon's farmworkers are essential. Just as we cannot wait to act on climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, we cannot wait to provide farmworkers with the living wages they deserve. **Though we would have preferred that overtime pay be paid to farmworkers now rather than have them wait for an extended phase-in period, we urge you to pass HB 4002 now to at least initiate a process that addresses these inequities as soon as possible.**

Since its founding almost 50 years ago, EMO has sought clear actions and responses to affirm an inclusive community for nurturing the shared life of humankind. As such, EMO is committed to advocating for the undoing of racist social, economic, and political systems. The exclusion of farmworkers from paid overtime is the legacy of racist policy decisions. When the Federal Labor Standards Act (FLSA) passed in 1938, farmworkers, who were predominantly black, were purposefully excluded from these protections in order to maintain social and economic control. Today, most farmworkers in Oregon are from Latin America or the Caribbean. This Jim Crow-era exclusion continues to perpetuate systemic racism in Oregon.

EMO both recognizes the diversity of opinion on farmworker overtime within the agricultural community and supports efforts to provide employers with financial support as Oregon's agricultural industry makes the transition to a fair wage structure for all. **However, it is imperative the shortcomings of Oregon's food system are no longer placed on farm workers, who have been denied the rights other workers have been afforded for far too long.**

Farmworkers, the backbone of our state, deserve basic dignity and respect, which is why we urge you to vote "yes" on HB 4002. Please know we will keep your legislative deliberations this session in our prayers.

In unity,

A'Jay Scipio, Program Manager
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, Northeast Emergency Food Program