

February 23, 2022

Co-Chairs Taylor and Holvey, and Members of the Joint Committee on Farm Worker Overtime:

I am writing as a member of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) of Oregon, Ashland where I serve as Branch Public Policy Chair. I express my strong support for House Bill 4002A.

HB 4002A will right a wrong that has existed since the Federal Labor Standards Law (FLSA) was signed into law by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1938. At the time primarily Black farmworkers were excluded from overtime pay along with Black domestic workers in order to maintain social and economic control of these workers by the Southern landowners. This “deal” made with Southern Senators and Congressmen perpetuated a labor system that had its roots in slavery. This miscarriage of justice cannot go on.

Today, most farmworkers in Oregon are from Latin America or the Caribbean. They are considered essential workers but are treated like “second-class” workers. They work on the front lines for up to 16 hours per day exposed to toxic chemicals, extreme heat and wildfire smoke, contagions and more while only earning between \$15,000 to \$17,499 a year. Working in one of the most physically demanding and exhausting jobs, few receive employer paid health insurance or have any healthcare coverage resulting in chronic illnesses and early deaths.

Being a farmworker is especially difficult for women. There are higher rates of sexual harassment, assaults and rape of women in the Agricultural industry. One reason female workers are exploited is because the perpetrators can threaten deportation due to the worker or her family members immigration status. When a charge is made lack of English language proficiency, fear of employer retaliation and distrust of authorities prevent the cases from moving forward.

As a consumer of crops grown and harvested by farmworkers, I want to know that the people providing me with my nutrition are being treated as justly and equitably as all other workers in this country. Oregon farmworkers deserve to be paid fairly for their labor not exploited for their labor.

I urge you to vote yes on House Bill 4002A.

Respectfully,

Regina Ayars  
Public Policy Chair

Ashland Branch  
American Association of University Women of Oregon  
Ashland, Oregon