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April 20, 2023

To: House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

From: Isa Peña, Oregon Worker Relief

Re: Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security Package

Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Owens and Hartman and members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water, my name is Isa Peña. I am the Director of Strategy at Innovation Law Lab, and I am here today as a member of the Executive Committee for Oregon Worker Relief, a statewide network of community-based organizations striving to solve the exclusionary impacts our community faces by providing direct aid to immigrants and refugees in Oregon and building systems that support mutual prosperity for all.

We support the Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security Package (BiDRAWS) and specifically the inclusion of the following provision: Safety Net Resources for Disaster Relief of Agricultural Workers.

This provision sets aside \$10 million for direct payments to farmworkers who lose income due to drought-related issues such as heat or smoke.

As extreme heat and wildfires become more common in Oregon, agricultural workers are forced to choose between working in dangerous conditions or losing a paycheck. Farmworkers are among the poorest workers in Oregon, with a median annual wage of \$29,680 (according to 2021 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).<sup>1</sup> Workers should not have to put their lives on the line or their health at risk in order to make ends meet and support their families. No farmworker should ever lose their life because of their work.

In December 2021, the Oregon legislature passed a \$100 million drought relief package and specifically allocated \$10 million to farmworkers who lost income due to extreme heat, wildfires, or wildfire smoke. We appreciate the legislature's initiative to provide additional relief to agricultural workers whose job is absolutely essential to our state.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/farming-fishing-and-forestry/agricultural-workers.htm#tab-5>

Through Oregon Worker Relief's Climate Change Fund, we have been able to provide life saving financial support for more than 9,000 Oregonians who have had to risk their lives in extreme weather conditions.

With a reinvestment of \$10 million to the Climate Change Fund, we are protecting the workers who face the most risks posed by the climate crisis. The dangers of the climate crisis are not evenly distributed. Many agricultural workers are immigrants, Indigenous, or Latinx and low-income. Prioritizing relief to the members of our communities who are most impacted is key to developing an equitable response to climate disasters. This is a cornerstone of environmental justice. Agricultural workers do essential work that feeds and supports our entire state, and they need safe workplaces and fair pay.

Please support the BiDRAWS package, with the inclusion of the \$10 million investment into the Climate Change Fund for farmworkers who lost income due to heat or smoke.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Isaura L. Pena". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Isaura" is written in a larger, more prominent script, followed by "L." and "Pena". The signature is located within a light gray rectangular box.