



Farmworker Housing Development Corporation

(503) 981-1618
1274 Fifth St. Suite 1-A
Woodburn, OR 97071
www.fhdc.org

“A Home Is Just the Beginning”

Friday, February 10, 2023

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this written support towards SB 592. My name is Maria Elena Guerra, and I represent the Farmworker Housing Dev. Corporation (FHDC). A Non-profit housing developer owner and operator that for more than 31 years have been providing healthy and safe housing for farmworkers in the Willamette Valley.

FHDC strongly encourage your support of SB 592 to improve workplace safety and health in Oregon. FHDC’s mission and work for the last 30 + years allows to experience very closely the impact on the physical and mental health of all those working in farm labor. We are here talking about kids as well as adults. Since most of our kids (as youngest as 7 years) work in farm labor during their summer vacations.

SB 592 improves current safety and health practices with the goal to make all workplaces in Oregon safer. Currently, Oregon OSHA can assess a penalty when an injury or death occurs as a result of a serious safety and health violation like a lack of training, equipment maintenance or supervision, preventable exposure to toxins, or even lack of safety gear like harnesses or hard hats.

However, Oregon OSHA penalties for these serious violations continue to be the lowest in the nation. In 2021 the average Oregon penalty for an injury that resulted from a serious violation was just over \$600 – 5 times less than the national average. And from an inspection due to a workplace death, Oregon’s average penalty was just over \$1,000 – over 10 times less than the national OSHA penalty average. These low penalties mean that the worst actors can commit multiple safety and health violations before the fine is significant enough to incentivize a change in behavior.

SB 592 also strengthens inspections – which we know are also an imperative component in making workplaces safer. SB 592 would trigger a comprehensive whole-workplace inspection if 3 or more violations occur within a year *or* an occupational death occurs. Currently, estimations suggest that it would take Oregon OSHA 112 years to inspect every workplace in Oregon. SB 592 ensures that when a death has occurred, a full inspection is done, checking that here are not related or wholly separate safety and health issues that could lead to another injury or death at the same workplace.

Unfortunately, we know that injuries and deaths take place across every industry in Oregon. An study conducted in our properties and done by OSU from years 2007 to 2016 in regards on farmworkers health, indicates that many of them suffer from: arthritis, depression in females more than males and diabetes 2 for kids due to lack of healthy food intake. This last one due to



the fact that both parents are working long hours and kids are left alone at home. It's OSHA's charge to protect workers by providing resources to employers and workers, inspecting workplaces, and rectifying employer mistakes or negligence. SB 592 improves reporting, strengthens penalties, and helps make sure that more workplaces are safe before another injury or death occurs.

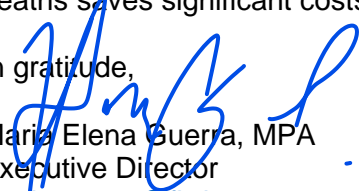
Even one worker death or injury from a preventable workplace hazard is too many and ultimately hurts the economy and our communities at large. Please do everything you can to make workplaces as safe as possible in Oregon. We encourage your support of SB 592.

Here are some other facts that I would hope this Committee will consider:

- Workers of color are disproportionately impacted
 - The Latino fatality rate increased again to 4.5 per 100,000 workers in 2020, 32% greater than the national average; that marks a 15% increase over the past decade. Of those who died in 2020, 65% were immigrants.
 - The Black worker fatality rate of 3.5 per 100,000 workers continues to be greater than the national average.
- Job injuries have long term impacts on workers: Even after receiving workers' compensation benefits, injured workers' incomes are, on average, nearly \$31,000 lower over 10 years than if they had not suffered an injury.

Job injuries and deaths have long-term impacts on the economy: Businesses pay between \$176 billion and \$352 billion annually in direct and indirect (overtime, training, and lost productivity) costs on workers' compensation losses for the most disabling injuries. Preventing injuries and deaths saves significant costs long term.

In gratitude,



Maria Elena Guerra, MPA
Executive Director
majiaguerra@fhdc.org
971-219-2996