



Advocating for Equity and Diversity throughout Oregon

Chair Fahey, Vice Chairs Breese-Iverson and Kropf, and Members of the House Committee on Rules,

For the record, my name is Melina Moran, Chair of the Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs (OCHA).

It is with gratitude that I submit this testimony on behalf of the Oregon Advocacy Commissions (OACs) – the Oregon Commission for Women (OCFW), Oregon Commission on Black Affairs (OCBA), Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs (OCHA), and the Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (OCAPIA) – to urge the Committee to support the passage of HB 2955.

In the 1940s, Mexico faced a drought and labor shortage ¹, and the United States was engulfed overseas in WWII, in which the draft created a vast need for laborers, so much so that the shortage nearly crippled the US agricultural sector ². Thus, the two Governments entered into a labor agreement leading to the development of the *Bracero Program*. Throughout the program's cumulative 22-year lifespan, millions of Mexican migrant workers left their families and homes to help sustain the economic resiliency of the two Nations, which rested their futures on the backs of the *Braceros*.

The Oregon State College (now known as Oregon State University) administered the Bracero federal program in Oregon. Growers in the Pacific Northwest imported over 40,000 Bracero farmworkers, composing the first significant wave of Mexican migrant workers who came to the region. Laborer shortages in Oregon, especially in the Hood River area, threatened Americans' livelihoods by putting years of hard work and investments at stake. Mexican workers filled the labor shortage and harvested most of the crops during this time of economic disparity. ³

Ultimately, the program proved successful for Mexico and the United States, but the *Bracero's* stories and outcomes differed significantly. On the home front, the US benefited from an excess of agricultural laborers, high profits, and a stable economy⁴, but the *Braceros* faced violence, discrimination, and racism on a daily basis.

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Despite the promise of relief from racism and segregation, Braceros were met with signs that read "no dogs, no negros, no Mexicans" hung on the walls of businesses across the country. They suffered withholding of salaries and threats of

deportation by their employers as a means of control, all while they endured upwards of 4-6 years of separation from their families. The atrocities committed against people who carried the weight of nations on their backs are reprehensible.

The Braceros played an integral role in the US efforts during WWII and in stabilizing our economy during and after the war. It is an understatement to say that these are some of the unsung heroes of American 20th-century history. The Braceros helped shape a nation, so it is only justice that we honor their work and commitment to the prosperity of both countries and their families by declaring August 4th as statewide Bracero Program Day.

We urge the committee to support House Bill 2955.

Sincerely,

Melina Moran, DPN, APRN
Chair, OCHA

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Sources

1. Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).
2. Maria Elena Bickerton, "Prospects for Bilateral Immigration Agreement with Mexico: Lessons from the Bracero Program," *Texas Law Review* [79], no. [4] (2001): 898
3. Mario Jimenez Sifuentez, *Of Forest and Fields: Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest* (Rutgers University Press, 2016).
4. Galarza, *Merchants of Labor*



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