



Service Employees
International Union
Local 503

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Date: February 13, 2025

To: Senate Committee on Labor and Business

From: Mike Powers

RE: Opposition to SB 622

Dear Chair Taylor, Vice-Chair Bonham, Members of the Committee:

My name is Mike Powers with SEIU Local 503, and I sit in opposition to SB 622. This bill would exempt employers who hire agricultural workers through the federal H-2A program from contributing to the unemployment insurance (UI) fund. We believe this proposal raises serious concerns about worker protections and unfairly disadvantages local workers seeking these jobs.

SEIU Local 503 represents 72,000 workers across Oregon. From the Pacific Ocean to the Snake River, our members keep roads open, fight wildfires, care for our loved ones at home and in facilities, ensure food safety, and so much more.

We share the concerns of many who stand with Oregon's agricultural workforce. The H-2A program requires employers to prove a shortage of available local workers, but this requirement is often poorly enforced. As a result, some employers prioritize hiring H-2A workers over local workers, undermining wages and job opportunities for workers here in Oregon.

Additionally, the H-2A program creates an imbalance of power between employers and workers. H-2A workers rely entirely on their sponsoring employers for wages, housing, and employment conditions. Many face substandard working conditions, inadequate housing, and low pay, with limited recourse due to their visa-dependent status.

This bill is also unfair to Oregon producers who hire local workers and contribute to their communities. While these employers would still pay into the unemployment system, those exploiting the H-2A program would be exempt. This disparity could further harm Oregon's farming economy by incentivizing reliance on temporary labor rather than investing in a stable, local workforce.

Oregon's agricultural sector is unique. Unlike states that grow just a few staple crops, we produce over 200 different agricultural products. Our farming industry is a vital economic engine, and federal programs often fail to address its specific needs.

Instead of SB 622, we support increased state investment in training agricultural workers where they live, ensuring they have the skills needed for long-term employment. We stand with Oregon farm families, who deserve policies that help them thrive rather than just survive.

Additionally, we recognize that housing remains a critical issue for many workers, including those in agriculture. That's why we support community-based housing



solutions, health clinics, Head Start programs, education, and workforce training — all of which benefit both agricultural workers and the communities they serve.

SB 622 is not the right solution for Oregon agriculture or the workers who sustain it. This bill would further exploit vulnerable workers and penalize local employers who do right by their employees. We urge you to vote “no” on SB 622. Instead, explore policies that truly support Oregon’s agricultural industry and farm families.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mike Powers
Immediate Past President
Political & Policy Strategist
SEIU Local 503