

Protecting agricultural workers in illegal camps.

HB 3194: Amend the Camp Operator Registration Act (CORA)

Illegal cannabis operations continue to be a significant issue in Oregon, with many operations subjecting workers to severely inadequate housing conditions at labor camps. These conditions include a lack of housing or makeshift shelters made from tarps and plywood, with no bathroom facilities. Under the current law, the Camp Operator Registration Act (CORA), operators of farm labor camps are required to register with the state and meet basic health and safety standards. However, **CORA has proven ineffective in addressing the unique challenges of Oregon's cannabis industry.**

Cannabis growers are almost¹ always *unregistered* to provide housing, and they disappear as soon as the harvest is done or the operation is raided by law enforcement. **That leaves workers with no recourse for harms they have suffered.** Currently, the liability of landowners who look the other way and allow the operation of these camps on their land is unclear under CORA. *(This bill would cover all unregistered camps, but the vast majority of illegal camps are happening in the illegal marijuana industry.)*

¹ According to OR OSHA housing registry, there is only one registered Cannabis operation labor camp.



Oregon should modernize CORA so it offers remedies that meet today's crisis.

- 1.** HB 3194 would create liability for negligent landowners who lease land to unregistered housing providers, unless they can demonstrate the lease is with a registered, licensed, and endorsed camp operator.
- 2.** It would remove the antiquated and onerous requirement that workers have to bring an “injunction” in any legal case. *(This requires proving ongoing harm, which is a high barrier and often not applicable with seasonal work like farmwork.)*
- 3.** Finally, it would modernize the penalty structure, last updated 30 years ago, and bring it in line with BOLI's current penalty power of **\$2,000 per violation.** *(The current TOTAL penalty a worker can get for violations of CORA is \$500).*

Common misconceptions about illegal cannabis operations:

⊗ MYTH

✓ FACT

Landowners have no way of knowing that illegal cannabis is being grown on their property.

These operations take up a lot of land and resources. They need large amounts of water and generate lots of garbage. **The illegal operators almost always pay landowners large amounts of cash.**

Most of these illegal operations are on public land.

All of the workers who have contacted CWRP worked on private land. In our experience, these operations are hiding in plain sight in our communities.

This bill will harm honest farmers who grow our fruit, nuts and other important crops.

There is no liability for farmers who are licensed to provide housing, or who contract with a licensed housing camp operator. This means a cherry grower in Hood River or a pear farmer in Medford would not be liable, as long as they or the contractors they work with are registered with OSHA to provide housing.

This is just an isolated problem in parts of Southern Oregon.

Illegal cannabis operations occur across the state, including throughout the Willamette Valley, in Central and Eastern Oregon, as well as in Southern Oregon.

NWJJP
NORTHWEST WORKERS' JUSTICE PROJECT

Oregon
Law Center
WORKING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE JUSTICE FOR LOW INCOME OREGONIANS

Kate Suisman: 503-765-7105

Martha Sonato: 971-801-5031

Representative Pam Marsh:
Rep.PamMarsh@oregonlegislature.gov