

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB 3194 – Holding Unregistered Farmworker Camps Accountable

Chair Kropf, Vice-Chairs Chotzen and Wallen, and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Emileni Lopez, and I served as a Case Manager at Centro De Servicios Para Campesinos for over a year. Our organization provides critical support to farmworkers and their families. We ensure they have access to essential resources such as legal aid, immigration integration services, access to targeted health and well-being programs, and advocacy against farmworker exploitation. Through the Cannabis Worker Resilience Partnership (CWRP), we specifically assist workers impacted by Oregon's cannabis industry, many of whom have experienced wage theft, dire housing conditions, and unsafe, exploitative, and illegal working conditions. Our work involves direct case management. We connect workers to housing, food, mental health resources, and financial aid, while our legal partners provide legal assistance. We do this work with the aim of advocating for stronger policies that protect workers from abuse. Today, I am writing in strong support for HB 3194, a bill that is necessary to help protect workers from unsafe and illegal housing conditions.

While working with CWRP, I witnessed the inhumane conditions workers face in Oregon's cannabis industry. These workers, most of whom take this job solely out of necessity, are subjected to extreme isolation, unsafe housing, and severe exploitation, yet they remain unseen and unheard.

These horrendous camps can be deliberately hidden deep in the mountains, far from any kind of protection. However, they are also often hidden in plain sight, in the cities we call home. Inside these camps, makeshift shelters are their only refuge. Some workers sleep on the bare ground in sleeping bags they are told to bring. Others sleep in metal train containers, and the lucky few in overcrowded, frigid cabins. Many are forced to sleep in cars or inside the same greenhouses they work in. In the summer, camping becomes the norm, not by choice, but because landowners and operators provide nothing. There are no proper bathrooms, no running water, no electricity, only silence and survival. Although some workers bathe in makeshift showers with cold water from hoses, most go days or even weeks without proper hygiene because the conditions make it impossible.

Workers remain silent, not because they want to, but because they have no choice. This job is dangerous. In one case, workers at a greenhouse operation shared that they were forbidden from speaking while trimming cannabis plants. The only sound was the clicking of scissors. No music. No conversation. Just silence and fear. Armed supervisors watched their every move, ensuring that even the slightest sign of resistance or complaint was met with swift retaliation. Speaking up meant risking not only their jobs but also putting their families in danger and leaving them stranded with nowhere to turn.

Sanitation is an afterthought. A single toilet might serve 30 people. These toilets do not have toilet paper, water, or any way to maintain even the most basic hygiene. In the mountains,

where these operations are even more remote, the toilets are nothing more than holes in the ground, often more than a 10 minute trek. In some cases, workers resorted to using buckets as makeshift restrooms, further dehumanizing an already horrific experience.

One story will forever haunt me. A woman described living in a train container, abandoned in the woods, in the middle of nowhere. At night, she could feel the freezing air seep into her bones. When she first arrived, there was a heater. But when it broke, it was never replaced despite empty promises that it would be. She told me how she would huddle with the other workers for warmth, praying to make it through another night. The cold was unbearable. She often slept in multiple layers of clothing but still woke up shaking. These conditions led to colds for many workers.

This is not just happening in one part of the state. These conditions exist all over Oregon, throughout the Willamette Valley, and especially in Southern Oregon. Landowners who profit off these operations claim ignorance, yet they accept payments and turn a blind eye to the suffering happening on their land. And when the harvest ends or law enforcement raids the site, the operators disappear quickly. Regardless of law enforcement intervention, workers are always left with nothing. No wages, no housing, no voice, and no justice. Many of these workers are owed thousands of dollars in unpaid wages. They are abandoned without food, money, or transportation, left to navigate an unfamiliar landscape with no support when the only reason they are in these situations is because they are merely trying to make a living.

This is not just an injustice. It is inhumane. No one should be subjected to these conditions, to this level of exploitation and disregard. No one should be discarded like an afterthought once their labor is no longer needed. This is not okay. It has never been okay. It will never be okay. We cannot continue to look the other way while hardworking people are suffering to this degree in our own backyard.

HB 3194 is a necessary step toward accountability. It holds landowners responsible when they knowingly lease land to unregistered, unlicensed, and exploitative operations. It removes barriers that make it nearly impossible for workers to seek justice. It modernizes penalties so that violations come with real consequences, not the outdated \$500 slap on the wrist that currently exists. Increasing penalties to align with existing labor laws will help remove bad actors who exploit legal loopholes to profit off human suffering.

HB 3194 is a common-sense solution to a serious problem. It protects workers, ensures landowners take responsibility for their property, and strengthens outdated laws.

On behalf of a very concerned citizen, I urge you to support HB 3194. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Emileni Lopez