

Submitter: Claire Zielinski
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2548

I am in opposition to HB 2548 because it threatens my ability to keep farming. Oregon already has some of the highest labor costs in the country, and after several tough years, I can't afford more regulations and wage increases.

With budget cuts and staffing shortages at every State agency I have no idea how this new governing body would be instituted. Let alone how they would have the time to deal with every issue that might come up in regards to staffing, firing, and conduct. It's about a two year waiting period for water rights through the Oregon Water Resources Department. You can only have one water right per property, but most farms have multiple employees. If the wait period for water rights is two years I can't even fathom how long it would take to get responses, help, and employment issues settled.

This bill would give unelected bureaucrats the power to set wages and safety rules that go far beyond current protections, adding more regulatory burden to small farms like mine. Farmers know how devastating this regulatory model is. Oregon's state agencies have adopted very harmful regulations in the last five years with little to no accountability for their actions. This board would be no different; its members aren't even elected.

HB 2548 unfairly targets agriculture by taking away at-will employment, meaning I wouldn't be able to make necessary staffing decisions without the risk of costly lawsuits. One claim can cost tens of thousands of dollars or more. I also don't believe that farms should be forced keep employees who may not meet performance expectations or adapt to the demands of the job. All other sectors in Oregon would be at-will, but farms—whose employment needs are impacted by weather, yields, trade, pests, diseases, etc.—would not. Not only is that unfair, but it will likely result in job loss, not job security.

I am also highly concerned on how taking away at-will employment will impact family dynamics on family farms. 96% of farms in Oregon are family owned and many of them are family operated. Working with family can be quite a difficult task, and if at-will employment is taken away. The task of reprimanding or even firing a family member for their poor behavior/performance could turn into something quite public, and be drawn out far longer than it needs to be. Worsening the family dynamics and relationships that family farms rely on.

This bill doesn't help workers or consumers; it just makes farming harder and more expensive. I have already had to manage hours to comply with agricultural overtime, and HB 2548 could force me to make tough operational choices like reducing my workforce, changing crops, automating, or selling the operation.

I oppose HB 2548 and urge people to vote no to protect our farms and jobs.