

WATER LEAGUE

*Water League engages the public
in water stewardship.*

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March 9, 2025

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To: House Committee On Judiciary

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In Memoriam
John L. Gardiner

Representative Jason Kropf, Chair
Representative Willy Chotzen, Vice-Chair
Representative Kim Wallan, Vice-Chair
Representatives Tom Andersen, Farrah Chaichi, Rick Lewis, Kevin Mannix,
Thuy Tran

RE: Water League supports HB 3194, which holds landowners and persons acting as farmworker camp operators jointly and severally liable for operating a farmworker camp on the landowner's property.

Dear Chair Kropf, Vice-Chairs Chotzen and Wallan, and committee members,

Water League supports HB 3194, which holds landowners responsible for inhospitable or inhumane living conditions associated with farmworker camps, registered or unregistered. The defense that landowners are unaware of farm-related activities on their properties that are violations of Oregon statutes or that cross over into criminal conduct is not only unacceptable but strains credulity.

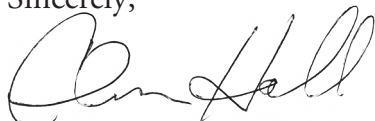
The law should incentivize landowners to know what occurs on their properties by holding them accountable. Much is made about the sanctity of private property rights except for when private property owners wish to avoid responsibility for violations or criminal conduct that occurs when they issue temporary use of their lands to others. The state should not grant landowners immunity from liability for unlawful acts related to farmworker camps because the stakes are too high.

In Josephine County, landowners frequently claim they do not know unlawful cannabis production has occurred on their lands when law enforcement raids those properties the landowners leased to organized crime syndicates. Neighbors know these claims are false and sympathize with the rare instances where criminals trespass onto the lands of absentee landowners. The state can no longer tolerate claims of ignorance because they enable and perpetuate human rights violations resulting from squalid living conditions. Below, we provide photographs from the summer and fall of 2021 in the Illinois Valley, Josephine County, which demonstrate these conditions.

We understand that opponents to HB 3194 are concerned about protecting the landowners who are legitimately unaware of farmworker camp violations committed on their lands by lessees. For the most part, these lessors are not cannabis operations; however, there is a long history of farmworker abuse in fruit and vegetable production related to low wages, long hours, physically demanding labor, exposure to heat and pesticides, and inhospitable living conditions. That HB 3194 could marginally protect all farmworkers from poor living conditions by holding landowners responsible is an improvement. If landowners become liable for unlawful living conditions on their lands, there is a reasonable presumption that farmworker living conditions will improve.

Related to the cannabis industry, the number of ignorant landowners in the Illinois Valley is a tiny fraction of all who lease their land; most prevaricate on the matter to avoid liability for their actions. Legislators should narrow the concept of *legitimately unaware* to hold more landowners accountable for being accessories to the violations and crimes committed on their properties. The argument that landowners should not be held responsible (except absentee landowners whose lands have been trespassed) must end.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Hall", written in a cursive style.

Christopher Hall
Executive Director













