



Chair Grayber, Vice-chairs Elmer and Muñoz, and members of the Committee,

My name is Cynthia Ramirez and I am a Policy Associate with PCUN, Oregon's Farmworker Union. On behalf of PCUN, I am testifying in strong support of HB 3193, the Farmworker Disaster Relief Fund.

This bill would create a permanent fund under the Oregon Health Authority to support farmworkers who are impacted by extreme weather conditions. In recent years, we have experienced an increase of dangerous weather conditions such as deadly heatwaves, unprecedented wildfires, and unhealthy air quality.

Our state's agriculture industry heavily relies on immigrant labor with more than 72,000 farmworkers. Most of them are immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, and Central America. Our farmworkers are proud to be Oregonians. One of our members stated, "I am very happy to live in Oregon. I already feel like this is my country."

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Oregon farmworkers are earning an average of \$34,500 annually, living paycheck to paycheck. They are not just living, but they are surviving. Farmworkers should not be forced to choose between working in extreme weather conditions or missing out on a paycheck. One of our members stated, "We cannot control the weather, and most of the time, we are forced to choose between protecting our health and paying our bills."

Over the past years, farmworkers have continued to work in dangerous weather conditions. An extreme weather event does not just happen during summer when heat waves and wildfires are rampant, but also in the winter when unexpected snow storms occur and cause our workers to suffer through pain. One of our members stated, "While in the cold, my body aches, and my bones hurt from the freezing temperatures." "The ice and cold make it hazardous to even drive on the roads to get to work, and working outside in these conditions puts us at great risk." We have heard countless stories of our farmworkers risking their health in order to simply survive.

Additionally, extreme weather does not just impact workers outside, but our community members who work inside as well. The recent heat rule adopted by Oregon OSHA addresses preventing heat-related illness in workers who are exposed to a heat index

equal to or greater than 80 degrees F. Indoor jobs are included in this rule. Therefore, our members working in canneries, food processing plants, and other indoor jobs must be included and protected as well.

Research reports that farmworkers are 35 times more likely to suffer from heat related deaths compared to other industries.¹ In summer 2021, Oregon experienced a record breaking heat wave where unfortunately, we lost a member of our community, Sebastian Francisco Perez, a farmworker and immigrant from Guatemala. Farmworkers continue putting their lives at risk for Oregon's agriculture industry. Our farmworkers are disproportionately affected due to lack of access to healthcare, lack of worker protections, and lack of workplace training.

PCUN strongly urges you to pass HB 3193, because our farmworkers deserve to live with respect.

Thank you for your time,

Cynthia Ramirez
Policy Associate
PCUN

¹ Gubernot, Diane M., et al. "Characterizing occupational heat-related mortality in the United States, 2000-2010: an analysis using the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries database." *Am J Ind Med.*, 2015. National Library of Medicine, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4657558/>. Accessed 21 02 2025.