

Submitter: Laura Lester
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3193

Dear Representatives Grayber, Elmer, Muñoz, Davis, Fragala, Nelson and Scharf:

I live in Portland, OR and am fortunate to be a constituent of Representative Grayber.

For the past four years, I have volunteered weekly at Western Farm Workers Association in Hillsboro, where with other volunteers we attempt to help people find cash support for wages lost due to illness, injury, lay-off's and other extenuating circumstances, and then the cascading effects of loss of wages--falling behind in rent, utility shut-off's and stress-related illnesses.

Most WFWA members live paycheck to paycheck, and those who have worked decades in agriculture and outdoor work are so bent and aged from their labors such that they appear decades older than their chronological age. They get up at dark in the summer in order to work in the cooler hours of the day and still work in the high heat of summer, they are out in the fields when the rest of us shelter indoors and only firefighters and farm workers are outside, and they experience lay-off's and loss of income (or no income) during the winter months.

We know the grievous historical error and racial animus that blocked farm workers and domestic from receiving social security when that act was created in the 1930s. Since 1935, farmworkers have been excluded from collective bargaining rights under the National Labor Relation Act. The recent (and well-intentioned) bill to give farm workers overtime for more than 40 hours of work has, in some cases, meant that those in control cut hours and disperse them over more workers to keep from paying overtime. So farm workers experience the previously mentioned cascade effect of financial obligations.

Family members who had a vineyard have stated repeatedly that native-born workers do not work hard or want to. They last a few days, maybe a few weeks or maybe even a season, but do not return. We are just unaccustomed to hard, physical labor for what many of us consider ridiculously low wages. Oregon has 72,000 farm workers (PICUN statistic). Most farmworkers in Oregon are immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, and Central America, many of whom speak an Indigenous language. In Oregon, an average farmworker makes around \$34,500 annually, living paycheck to paycheck to support their families.

Due to documentation, most farmworkers are generally ineligible to receive federally

funded benefits such as Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Individuals who are undocumented are less likely to assert their labor rights out of fear of retaliation or worse, deportation. Especially now.

Oregon has far more protections for our farm workers than many states. I am proud of the work that advocates and legislators have done. Let's not stop. Let's keep making this a good place to live--where we value the work and the lives of ALL Oregonians and realize how we are all interconnected.

PLEASE PASS HB 3191: The Farmworker Disaster Relief Fund.

Respectfully submitted,
Laura Lester