



March 10, 2025

**TO:** Members of the House Committee on Labor and Workplace Standards

**FR:** Paloma Sparks, Oregon Business & Industry

**RE:** HB 3193 – Farmworker Relief Fund

---

Chair Grayber, members of the House Committee on Labor and Workplace Standards. For the record, I am Paloma Sparks, Executive Vice President & General Counsel for Oregon Business & Industry (OBI).

OBI is a statewide association representing businesses from a wide variety of industries and from each of Oregon's 36 counties. In addition to being the statewide chamber of commerce, OBI is the state affiliate for the National Association of Manufacturers and the National Retail Federation. Our 1,600 member companies, over 75% of which are small businesses, employ more than 250,000 Oregonians. Oregon's private sector businesses help drive a healthy, prosperous economy for the benefit of everyone.

The Worker Relief Fund was established in 2020 to provide a safety net to workers who had to continue to work despite the threat of a global pandemic. When the fund was created, we were assured this was a temporary program, necessary due to the impact COVID-19 was having on farmworkers and their families. The fund uses were expanded in 2021 with federal funds for the Climate Relief Fund.

Because we knew the 2020 version was intended to be temporary and to address the crisis, funds needed a quick mechanism for distribution. Business representatives did not object to distribution through a nonprofit that also happens to be an advocacy group. Had we not been in the midst of a crisis and using federal funds, we would not have supported allocating these funds to a nonprofit that has no accountability to the state. We have significant concerns about an entity who regularly advocates for laws in the legislature also having control over state funds and distributing

However, that crisis has now passed. If this program is going to move forward as a permanent program, it must be designed for the long-term not designed to respond to a once in a lifetime global crisis.

HB 3193 contains overly broad definitions that may be more expansive than makes sense. For example, the definition of “farmworker” is defined as someone employed in a lawful activity related to: agriculture, farming, fishing, planting or harvesting trees, dairy, ranching, food processing, canning, slaughtering, packaging, butchering or a nursery. That definition could include far more than workers directly involved in planting, pruning, or harvesting, as farm work has traditionally been defined.

Additionally, “disaster” is not limited to terms defined in law already. The definitions should be tied to an emergency declared by the State or local governments under ORS chapter 401 or a public health emergency under ORS 433. HB 3193 includes vague terms identifying certain events including: “drought, wildfire, earthquake, hurricane, flood, excessive heat, tornado, winter storm, snowstorm, freeze, hail, smoke, tsunami, volcanic eruption or other adverse weather event.” If an event is of sufficient magnitude these events would already qualify as emergencies under Oregon law.

Finally, our primary reason for wanting to testify on this bill is the fact that this bill creates a permanent allocation of \$10 million per biennium to a nonprofit. Meanwhile, the Bureau of Labor and Industries has been chronically underfunded and has been asked to do more and more with less funds. That agency serves the farmworker community ably and has adopted many policies to ensure that immigrants, whether they have documentation or not, are protected by Oregon employment laws. We believe BOLI needs to be properly funded, but every time we have advocated for investment of general funds into BOLI, we have been told there are insufficient funds available to use general funds. The legislature has shown their commitment to being on the forefront of employment laws but has not invested in the necessary tools to support those policies. As you consider funding asks, we urge you to prioritize existing commitments.