



**Testimony on HB 2548
Submitted by Oregon Winegrowers Association
House Labor and Workforce Standards Committee
March 12, 2025**

Chair Grayber, and members of the committee, the Oregon Winegrowers Association (OWA) is writing to oppose HB 2548, which would set up an independent Agriculture Workforce Labor Standards Board.

OWA is a member-driven advocacy organization advancing the interests of the largest agricultural economic impact sector in Oregon. We have hundreds of winery and vineyard members representing over two-thirds of Oregon's wine production. For more than 40 years, OWA has advocated for policies that support the health, growth and economic sustainability of Oregon's wine industry.

We have deep respect and admiration for the individuals who work in our vineyards. Our vineyard workers are an important part of our Oregon community. Quality winemaking starts in the vineyard. They meticulously tend to our vines and fields throughout the year, and during our short but intense harvest season in fall, they pick our wine grapes to quickly get them to our wineries for processing. Grapevines are touched by workers on average at least 10 times each year. Our vineyard workers are highly skilled, and many have been in our employ for years and even decades.

Many of our Oregon vineyards and wineries are small operations with only few employees. This bill will take away the ability of vineyard workers to have a direct and productive relationship with winery and vineyard owners and operators. Employees should be allowed to have a direct line of communication with their employers on critical issues of compensation, hours and working conditions. Putting these decisions in the hands of an independent statewide board – that may have little knowledge of vineyard operations - will only erode trusting relationships that should exist in all workplaces, especially for small businesses that may only have a few employees.

This bill creates broad powers given to an unelected board appointed by the Governor. It is unprecedented how the Oregon legislature would be ceding its policymaking authority on key workforce and workplace issues to an unelected board with no accountability to the legislative branch of government. We don't see why the public interest would be served by this ceding of policymaking power by the legislature.



Here are the other major problems we see with this legislation:

- Oregon agriculture already has some of the strongest wage, hour and workplace standards in place, especially compared to the rest of the nation. It is very unclear what problem this bill is trying to fix.
- Creates unworkable sector-wide “training” requirements done by an unspecified “worker organization” that may have no knowledge of vineyard operations. This training must occur before a person can begin work. This requirement would be detrimental to farming operations that sometimes need to bring on staff quickly based on workforce changes, weather events or other unforeseen circumstances. Further, there is no “one way” to train all farmworkers in a diverse agriculture state like Oregon. Each farm operation is different based on the crop, with existing worker training that already occurs.
- The at-will employment prohibition, which would be the first in the nation for the agriculture industry, limits flexibility for staffing and termination decisions, which ties the hands of employers that need certainty in their business operations.
- Unduly targets Oregon’s agriculture sector. No other state has a policy such as this for the agriculture sector, nor does an independent workforce labor standards board apply to other business sectors in Oregon.
- Finally, it appears this bill only has the potential to increase costs for vineyards and wineries, at a time when many are struggling to be profitable in a competitive marketplace. Additionally, the bill is silent on the funding for this board, which will have investigatory and subpoena powers. We can only assume the cost for this new board will be borne by the agriculture industry with new fees.

For these reasons, OWA joins others to oppose HB 2548. We ask the House Labor and Workforce Standards Committee to do the same.