

Submitter: Kenneth Watkins
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2548
TO: House Committee on Labor and Workplace Standards
FROM: Kenneth Watkins
SUBJECT: Yes on HB 2548

Dear Chair Grayber, Vice-Chairs Elmer and Muñoz, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kenneth Watkins, I live in Eugene, and I am writing to express my strong support of HB 2548 to create a Farmworker Standards Board in Oregon.

We currently have over 72,000 farmworkers in Oregon, who work extremely hard every day to put food on our tables. Farmworkers are our fellow taxpaying citizens and neighbors who contribute over \$6.4B to our state's economy. And yet, they experience very poor working conditions and earn an average of less than \$35,000 annually.

For generations, farmworkers have been excluded from key labor protections such as the National Labor Relations Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act. These exclusions have resulted in farmworkers being some of the lowest paid workers in the state while enduring very harsh working conditions. Creating a Farmworker Standards Board will ensure that farmworker's voices have a say in setting industry standards and correcting historic exclusions.

HB 2548 will give historically excluded workers their first voice in setting industry standards with real enforcement power and accountability. The board will ensure access to fair wages, safe conditions, and protection from retaliation.

I grew up on a small family dairy farm and was privileged to be in the first generation in my family to have the opportunity to attend college. I later earned a Ph.D. in Biochemistry and had a productive career at the University of Oregon as a molecular biology researcher. After retiring from research, I also worked at two small organic farms in the Eugene-Springfield area. From my life experience, I know about manual labor. I know what it feels like to work long hours 7 days a week, every week of the year. And I know, very well, how hard our (often immigrant) farmworkers labor to try to earn a meager living to support their families, while we live in relative opulence with labor laws that protect us and our way of living. For the simple reason of justice, I believe there should not be a different set of rules for different categories of work; and this goes especially to workers that provide such a vital service as planting, growing and harvesting our food. Or, put another way: there should never be labor

laws that are inequitable or disadvantage the poorest and most vulnerable of us.

I urge you to vote YES on HB 2548 to create a Farmworker Standards Board and give farmworkers the ability to set standards for their industry. They deserve it, and we should acknowledge their vital work for us all by passing this bill.

Sincerely,

Kenneth P. Watkins, Ph.D.