

Submitter: Lorrie Fricke

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Labor and Workplace Standards

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2548

My name is Lorrie Fricke. I am a long-term employee for a multi-generational family-owned farm. I am asking you to oppose HB 2548 because it threatens everyone who makes a living in Agriculture. My coworker and I went from working full-time to part-time because of the increased cost to stay in compliance with constant regulatory changes and lower market prices year after year and in the current economy it is going to get worse before it gets better. It is ridiculous bills like this that will cost me my job and four hundred more returning workers and families we employ during the harvest season. So, tell me again how that is supporting and protecting the workers when farms they work for are out of business because they can no longer afford to keep farming. Oregon already has some of the highest labor costs in the country, and after several tough years, we cannot afford more regulations and wage increases. As the safety Compliance Coordinator our employees trained in health and safety compliance on the farm, and we already have worker protection standards and training in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all our employees. I am livid about how this bill will negatively impact the farm and the employees who work for them.

This bill would give unelected officials the power to set wages and safety rules that go far beyond current protection, adding more regulatory burden to small farms. Farmers know how devastating this regulatory model is. Employees would also know if they were more informed on the big picture. Oregon's state agencies have adopted very harmful regulations in the last five years with little to no accountability for their actions. This board would be no different; its members are not even elected.

HB 2548 unfairly targets agriculture by taking away at-will employment, meaning I would not be able to make necessary staffing decisions without the risk of costly lawsuits. One claim can cost tens of thousands of dollars or more. I also do not believe that farms should be forced to keep employees who may not meet performance expectations or adapt to the demands of the job. All other sectors in Oregon would be at-will, but farms—whose employment needs are impacted by weather, yields, trade, market conditions, pests, diseases, etc.—would not. Not only is that unfair, but it will result in job loss, not job security.

This bill does not help workers or consumers; it just makes farming harder and more expensive. We have already had to reduce the hours for workers to comply with agricultural overtime, and HB 2548 would have more severe consequences.

I urge you to vote NO to protect our farms and jobs.

Lorrie Fricke