

To: House Committee on Labor and Workplace Standards
From: Monica M. Arce, CNM
Re: Strong support for HB 2541 - Expression of milk protections for all farmworker women
Date: 03/19/2025

Dear Honorable Grayber, Vice-Chairs Elmer and Muñoz, and members of the Committee,

I am Monica Arce, the Medical Director at Virginia Garcia Reproductive Health Clinic in Hillsboro, Oregon. I am submitting testimony today in my personal capacity, not on behalf of my employer. I urge you to support the passage of HB 2541 allowing an opportunity for expression of milk for all farmworker women (removing an exemption for certain classes of workers) the same as other working nursing mothers in Oregon.

My experience at the clinic is that many of our farmworker patients who have breastfed before or have seen a farmworker relative breastfeed, choose not to “do both” as they say they feel that continuing to breastfeed while working in the fields will not be possible or allowed.

Even when I have shared with working mothers that they can pump and store their milk for the baby so that they can continue to breastfeed, they do not feel that this is possible given their limited ability to pump in privacy, calmly, hygienically. They are also afraid of potentially being a burden at the job site and compromising their job. Unfortunately, many women choose instead to train the baby on the bottle early to make it easier for the baby to never get used to breastfeeding. However, in the long run training the baby early on the bottle causes difficulties maintaining latch and long term breastfeeding.

We have collectively spent decades providing community education to women about the benefits of breastfeeding and have disseminated the information in multiple languages. Ironically, until now, we had not realized that some of the women who have not been able to initiate or continue to breastfeed were also exempt under Oregon law from an opportunity to take a break at work to do so.

Making the possibility of expressing milk at work for handharvest workers is such a wise health decision as it also helps the sense of well-being for moms who are working no matter their position. I strongly support this bill and my sincere hope is that it becomes the law in Oregon very soon. We need such protection as a matter of fairness and equity.

Sincerely,

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