



*Testimony in support of HB 2541 (2025)*

Chair Grayber, Vice Chairs Elmer and Muñoz, and members of the Committee,

My name is Kate Suisman. I am an attorney at the Northwest Workers' Justice Project (NWJP). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important bill. We represent workers in low-wage jobs when bad things happen to them at work: when they are not paid, or are discriminated against for being in a protected class or are retaliated against for speaking up. Finally, we engage in policy advocacy and try to bring the important perspectives of workers in low-wage jobs and immigrant workers to these policy discussions.

We write to support HB 2541 including many farmworker women in the protections to take breaks to express breastmilk during work hours. The health benefits of breastfeeding to both babies and mothers are well known. Including farmworker women in this protection is critical to end an inequitable and harmful exclusion. Farmworker women want to provide their babies the best start of life possible.

Many Oregonian women who regularly do agricultural jobs continue to work seasonally even when caring for newborns and young children. They often have long-standing relationships with employers or farm labor contractors to work each year picking strawberries in the Willamette Valley for a few weeks in June and/or picking blueberries or mora - blackberries - in July. Other women may do other work in the fall and winter like cleaning or packing house work but work picking cherries during the month of July. Their families regularly piece together these different seasonal opportunities to get the money to work to cover their basic needs throughout the year.

Many of them would like to continue to breastfeed their children and not miss these needed employment opportunities. This bill would allow them to do so.

Without the bill's protections and under current law, these seasonal workers have to choose. If they choose to work, they are not able to express milk for their babies. The 10-minute breaks often provided are insufficient to express milk. Most of the toilet facilities provided to seasonal agricultural workers at this time are port-a-potties which are inadequate to provide a clean, private location. At this time, while providing time and space for agricultural working women to express milk would only require moderate accommodations, employers are almost never providing the time and space to seasonal agricultural working women to express milk on their own initiative. These protections are needed to make the ability to breastfeed your child a reality in the farmwork workplace.

Women play a key and growing role in seasonal agricultural employment. Providing a healthy and accommodating workplace for women will help employers and contractors recruit and retain the workers they need. This bill will help benefit women, children, employers and our communities. Thank you.