

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kathy Kuffin and I'm writing here in strong opposition to SB 999 and the -2 amendment, a bill that removes key safety protections for farmworker housing, allowing employer-provided homes to avoid basic health standards, which puts student health at risk by weakening oversight and enforcement.

I retired in Sept. 2024 after 27 years as a K-5 Bilingual Reading Specialist in Woodburn, Oregon, helping struggling readers, many of whom were from farm working families. From my practice I can tell you that even under current conditions, the health of poor and farmworker students is already not good. The majority of my caseload of kids suffer from allergies and asthma. Many already complain that their homes are cold.

Safe and healthy housing is a fundamental human right. This is why I am resoundingly against any lowering of the bar for upholding and enforcing health and safety standards for students living in employer-provided homes. I have seen the devastating effect that poor housing conditions can have on our students' lives and learning.

I have had students who had chronic sinus and ear infections that were so severe that they spent a good percentage of their formative years (birth to primary school) unable to hear clear speech and sounds, which adversely affected their phonics and reading. One of my 2nd grade student had bloody cracks in all of the folds of his fingers, arms, legs and neck and was so chronically congested that he did not have the breath to speak in a voice much louder than a whisper. One of my 4th grade students had tonsils so swollen that he could not speak in full sentences and was under consideration for Special Education services due to difficulty communicating. In short, many of my students are behind in academics because they are sick a lot, and these three cases I've recounted were investigated by our school's Student Intervention Team, in collaboration with medical professionals, and were concluded to be related to adverse home environmental living conditions.

Oregon is an agricultural state and Oregon statutes should protect agricultural workers and their families just as they are obligated to protect any other workers and their families from all other professions and walks of life.

At this moment when the degree of vulnerability for farmworker families is already on a rapid rise, it's no time to further erode provisions for the basic human right to safe and healthy housing for farmworker families.

I implore you to reject SB999 and any amendments that compromise essential protections for farmworker families.

Thank you for your attention as you consider this bill and its grave implications.

