

TO: House Committee on Labor and Workplace Standards
FROM: Shari Sirkin
SUBJECT: Yes on HB 2548

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

My name is Shari Sirkin, and until a few months ago lived in Corbett, Oregon where my husband and I ran a small-scale vegetable farm for over 25 years. I am writing today in strong support of HB 2548 to establish a Farmworker Standards Board in Oregon

I have one foot in the farm owner camp and the other in the farmworker camp as I worked right alongside our workers in the field. I care about *all* the farmworkers in this state and country. Should this bill pass, and I really hope it does, farmers will not in *any* way "lose control of their own operations" as some have falsely stated. Farm owners always have the option of treating their workers like fellow human beings and abiding by basic rules of decency. If they don't, they should face the consequences.

Farmworkers in fields and orchards are some of the hardest working, lowest paid and worst treated people in this country. I've witnessed mistreatment with my own eyes and ears and it is heartbreaking. Yet, their essential labor sustains us and keeps food on our tables. We simply can not and should not base our economy on the exploitation of these workers. For far too long this entire class of workers has been excluded from labor protections granted to all other workers by the National Labor Relations Act and Fair Labor Standards Act, thanks to heavy lobbying by the Farm Bureau.

Farmworker Standards Boards would be no different than any other industry Standards Boards, such as those for teachers, pharmacists, social workers, doctors, etc. It's high time this clearly important sector of our society be acknowledged and given a voice. There should be no argument about that.

We learned during COVID who our *real* essential workers are and the 72,000+ Oregon farmworkers absolutely met that criteria... and also bring in over \$6.4B to our state's economy. We should *want* to have solid protections and support for these laborers. Why should they not have the access to fair wages, safe conditions, and protection from retaliation that is provided to every other worker in the state?

How many hours and weeks have you spent hunched over harvesting cabbage in torrential rain or scorching heat?

I encourage you to vote YES on HB 2548 to create a Farmworker Standards Board and give farmworkers and other stakeholders the ability to set standards for the industry.

Sincerely,
Shari Sirkin