

TO: House Committee on Rules
FROM: Cynthia Ramirez
SUBJECT: Yes on HB 2548 -7

Chair Bowman, Vice-Chairs Drazen and Pham, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Cynthia Ramirez, I live in Salem, Oregon and I am writing testimony in strong support of HB 2548 -7 to conduct a study on Oregon farmworkers and learn about their experiences at the workplace.

There are over 72,000 Oregon farmworkers, who put food on our tables and contribute over \$6.8B to our state's economy, yet they earn an average of just \$34,500 annually. Most farmworkers are immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, and Central America, many of whom speak an Indigenous language.

Farmworkers and farmworker advocates brought forward a policy to establish a workforce standards board in Oregon. Unfortunately, it is not moving forward this session. While farmworkers and immigrants face attacks from the federal administration, the Oregon legislature has the opportunity to learn about the challenges farmworkers are facing.

HB 2548 -7 will help inform the legislature and the general public about the conditions that farmworkers are facing in the workplace. By funding a study through Portland State University, this bill puts the voices of workers at the center of policymaking while also including the perspectives of farmers. This is how we create lasting, effective change through listening, research, and engagement.

My mother is a farmworker, and I would not speak on behalf of her work experience, that is her personal life and her personal story to tell. However, I do uplift her voice when I can. There's a strong difference between speaking on behalf of someone and uplifting their voice. The study is to *uplift* the voice of farmworkers and to hear directly from them. Why do farmers keep speaking on behalf of their employees? It is extremely unfair to speak on behalf of your workers and only highlight the "good." Have you ever felt nervous to speak about certain topics with friends or family members? Imagine speaking out about your own boss. For the farmers to speak on behalf of their workers is an extreme power imbalance. In certain situations, that could be considered hearsay.

I would like to highlight that in an extremely racist political climate, it was incredibly brave for farmworkers to come and speak about their experiences at the public hearing in March. That really highlights the dire situation farmworkers are experiencing in the workplace for them to show up and share their moving stories in such a political climate.

We should not ignore their stories and simply call them “outliers” in a “good agriculture industry.” It starts with one voice for others to have the courage to speak up. How do you think change happens?

Overall, it was incredibly disappointing to see the lack of support for the workers who put on our tables. The lack of support and understanding from the legislature itself. I cannot understand how someone can drive down the I-5, look out their windows while driving by the fields, and not wonder about the stories or experiences of the workers outside? We continue to see farmworkers working in extreme weather conditions, risking their lives and safety and we think that is normal? It's time to ACT on your words and all the praise you give to farmworkers for all their work. There's so much you can do with just praise and good words when real lives are at risk.

I urge you to support HB 2548 with the -7 amendment and invest in Oregon's ability to understand and serve the people who feed our state.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Ramirez