

Chair Bowman, Vice-Chairs Pham and Drazen, and members of the committee,

My name is Lesley Tamura. I am a pear grower in Hood River County the board chair of Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers association. I oppose the -7 amendment of HB 2548.

I've heard from the proponents of the original bill that our employees have "no workplace protections." This is news to me and my colleagues, who have spent thousands of hours engaged in rulemaking and legislative processes to establish these protections, and are also responsible for implementing those rules once they've been finalized, no matter how convoluted or unreasonable they are. We are tired of being defined by lies about us, about our industry, and about our employees; **and we are fed up with those lies being used to craft policy. This amendment is a continuation of using lies to create policy.**

This amendment only exists because the legislature did not support an ag workforce board. They recognized the damage it would do. So, why is this report even on the table?

If you think we should be happy with this amendment, if you think we should be grateful for it in comparison to the original bill, let me shatter that illusion for you right now. This report is not about giving our employees a voice. We see this for exactly what it is – a way to set the stage and give ammunition to bring the original legislation back in two years based on a report filled with skewed and biased data.

What are the problems with this amendment?

First, the complete lack of oversight.

The report has conveniently been assigned to PSU's Center for Public Service, a program that already has ties to the proponents. Why is this study not sent out for bid or request for proposal to multiple third-party options to promote transparency and efficient use of taxpayer dollars? Or, if it must be assigned, why is it not assigned to the Oregon Department of Agriculture, or an organization that has some semblance of understanding of agriculture? State agencies with regulatory authority over wage and hour law, unemployment insurance, or workplace safety are left out of the analysis completely. Why? They have relevant data that should be included.

PSU clearly needs access to farmworkers to complete this study, yet there's nothing in here about working alongside employers for access. This means they will be working through the proponents, which means the proponents will be the only ones involved in crafting the study and selecting the participants. You can skew a lot of data based on what questions you ask, how you ask them, and who is selected to be interviewed.

If the questions asked of ag employees are "Do you want to be paid more money?" or "Do you want more workplace benefits?", I cannot imagine anyone that would say no to that. But will the interviews include an explanation of the trade-offs of this policy, and will the report include a fair and objective analysis of those trade-offs? We already know the answer.

It says this report will "gather firsthand experience and perspectives from farmworkers." This statement is incredibly vague. It does not specify that they must be current farmworkers who have experienced the current workplace protections. These interviews could be conducted with people who worked as ag employees before many of these protections existed. This doesn't provide an accurate picture of the current protections in place.

For transparency and neutrality, there should be a board to oversee the design of the study and the methods used that includes both proponents and industry.

This study is almost completely based on qualitative data. While qualitative data has its place in any study, relying on it to this degree is a huge problem. Using primarily qualitative data means there is limited ability to make generalizations, and a strong potential for biases in interpretation. Qualitative research is more susceptible to researcher biases and perspectives, allowing for data and interpretation to be influenced and leading to skewed results. The absence of objective measures built in to this proposed study is unacceptable. Interviews conducted will collect information based on feelings and personal interpretation of existing rules and regulations, with no objective data to support them.

Another issue is employer participation. This amendment requires that we provide information about benefits and policies. Nothing in this amendment tells us this is a safe process to participate in. There is no guarantee of confidentiality, no oversight that ensures this will be conducted in a fair manner. We know from experience that any information we provide will absolutely be used against us, both personally and to continue to attack our industry with dangerous overreach.

We are not against sharing information - we have shared various aspects of our operations openly in the past for regulatory purposes. During the Oregon OSHA agricultural labor housing Rules Advisory Committee process many of my members shared the cost of constructing and upgrading our employee housing through receipts, invoices, and bids. Growers have also shared wage and hour information with economists at Oregon State University for economic studies they have conducted. This is not about having something to hide; when we are confident that this information will be used objectively and in a fair and balanced manner, we openly share it. This proposed study will never be fair, balanced, or objective in the way it has been drafted. To expect us to participate in this is unfair and wrong.

The **cost of this report** is conveniently left blank in the amendment; during the public hearing it was shared that the estimated cost is \$600,000 for PSU to conduct this study. Oregon is struggling to find funding for critical issues, but this high price tag for a report that will undoubtedly be skewed and biased is not presenting an issue for Oregon lawmakers? If lawmakers are willing to spend taxpayer dollars on this, shouldn't they demand that it be a valid study that will provide objective truth?

I also can't help but note that Senate Bill 779 that would continue funding the AgriStress Helpline has been sitting in Ways and Means since March, not released to a subcommittee. According to American Farm Bureau, multiple studies show that farmer suicide rates are 2-5x higher than the national average. Our lawmakers are willing to spend money to fund a new report with no oversight, but not to support an already-existing program that offers direct and tangible mental health support to our industry, including our employees.

When this report is inevitably used to bring an ag labor board proposal back in 2027, the reality of farming in Oregon will not be any better. It will be worse. We will face even more challenges; our labor shortage will be worse, ag overtime be at the 40-hour threshold, and the large infrastructure changes required by OR-OSHA's new housing rules will be in place, reducing our workforce even more because we will lose housing capacity. The report is due at the end of 2026, but these changes beginning in 2027 will have major impacts on work hours, wages, and availability of on-farm housing. The data collection in this study needs to ensure that those incoming changes are accounted for when we're talking about the impacts of housing and pay on farmworkers. Rather than pushing forward with even more regulations, why aren't you willing to wait to see the impact of those huge changes before targeting us yet again?

There are clear ways to ensure this study is valid and presents an honest picture of the agricultural industry. It is the responsibility of our lawmakers to ensure that it does, and if you cannot ensure that, then you should not vote in favor of it. Without any accountability and oversight, there is no reason to believe this

report will be conducted or presented accurately and without bias. It is for these reasons that I oppose the -
7 amendment.