

**To:** House Committee on Rules  
**From:** Martha Sonato, Oregon Law Center  
**Re:** Support for HB 3194  
**Date:** 06/11/2025

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

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of HB 3194 with the -6 amendment. The -6 amendment before you reflect a compromise with the Oregon Farm Bureau and Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers, bringing them to a neutral position. HB 3194-6 seeks to update the longstanding Camp Operator Registration Act (CORA) to protect agricultural workers living in unregistered labor camp operations.

HB 3194 amends the Camp Operator Registration Act by:

- Establishing joint and several liability between landowners and farmworker camp operators if they knew or should have known their property was being used for an unregistered farmworker camp.
- Includes a presumption the landowner did not know about the unregistered camp operation if there is a written lease or copy that prohibits unregistered camps- unless proven otherwise by a preponderance of evidence.
- Removes the onerous requirement that workers must bring an injunction under CORA.
- Finally, it would modernize the penalty structure, last updated 30 years ago, from \$500 to \$2,000 for all violations found under CORA per worker.

This proposal is narrowly crafted to apply only to unregistered camp operators, not to legal, registered operations that follow health and safety laws. We believe HB 3194 updates CORA to meet today's challenges, particularly those in Oregon's cannabis industry.

### **Background on CORA**

CORA (ORS 658.750), passed in 1989, was created to ensure farmworker housing in Oregon meets basic health and safety standards. It requires camp operators to register annually with the Department of Consumer and Business Services.

Before CORA, many camps were unregistered and unsafe. The law helped improve that by encouraging compliance through legal protections and oversight. Only unregistered camps can be sued under CORA, making registration an incentive. Since its passage, CORA has significantly reduced the number of unregistered farmworker camps. But in recent years, we've seen a troubling rise in unregistered camps, particularly in the cannabis sector.

While CORA has been effective in many areas, it has not kept pace with the evolving challenges in Oregon's cannabis industry. The law needs updating to respond to the realities workers are facing today.

### **Base Bill and Compromise**

The -6 amendment is the result of extensive work with the Oregon Farm Bureau, Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers, and other stakeholders. As one of the proponents, we've maintained an open line of communication before and during legislative session. My colleague Kate from NWJP and I attended multiple meetings and proposed several amendments to address concerns raised during the House Judiciary public hearing. We also participated in good-faith discussions led by Rep. Kropf and Rep. Marsh.

Our goal throughout has been clear: to target unregistered farmworker camp operations and ensure landowners are accountable when they knowingly allow these unsafe conditions, particularly in the cannabis industry, where workers have reported inhumane treatment.

### **Key Differences in the -6 Amendment Compared to the Original Bill (HB 3194):**

- **Landowner liability:** The original bill held landowners jointly liable with unregistered camp operators unless they could prove the lease was with a registered operator. The -6 amendment replaces that with a "knew or should have known" legal standard, shifting the burden to workers to prove the landowner knew or should have known of an unregistered camp operation.
- **Farmworker camp definition:** Removes the word "*permitted*" from the definition of farmworker camps.
- **Penalties:** The original bill proposed a \$2,000 penalty *per violation* under CORA. The -6 amendment removes "per violation" and instead raises the flat amount from \$500 to \$2,000 *total* per worker regardless of the number of violations. This was a significant compromise on our part. We remain concerned it won't be a strong enough deterrent and will continue monitoring its impact on the ground.

HB 3194 helps level the playing field for farmworker camp operators who follow the rules and protects workers from being housed in dangerous conditions. We urge the committee to pass HB 3194-6 to protect Oregon's farmworkers and hold unregistered camp operators and negligent landowners accountable.

Sincerely,  
Martha Sonato  
Legislative Advocate  
Oregon Law Center