

Dear Chair Senator Dembrow, Vice-Chair Senator Thomsen and Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

We are writing in support of SB 404-2. We serve as the Oregon Climate Action Plan and Policy Manager and Southern Oregon Environmental Justice Grassroots Organizer for Beyond Toxics. Beyond Toxics is a statewide environmental justice organization advancing policies that ensure meaningful participation and cultivating grassroots leadership from Oregon's frontline and impacted communities.

SB 404-2 includes numerous measures that will make transitioning from conventional to organic or regenerative biodiverse farming practices more feasible for Oregon farmers. Supporting the growth of organic and regenerative farming practices in Oregon will protect farmworker health and safety as well in that it will reduce toxic exposures for farmworkers and surrounding communities. While the Organic Action Plan Task Force outlines a diverse range of interests, we would recommend that the bill include measures to ensure that historically underrepresented communities are represented. BIPOC (Black, Indigneous, and People of Color) communities, especially migrant and Latinx farmworkers, must have a seat at the table when making decisions that impact the health and wellbeing of themselves and their families. Please ensure that their voices are heard and that these communities are at the forefront of consideration for grant programs as Oregon moves to center more organic and regenerative farming practices.

In addition, SB 404-2 directs the Oregon Department of Agriculture to establish a new full-time position for a soil health specialist. Healthy soils not only increase productivity, water retention, and pest and disease prevention, but also act as a crucial component to climate mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency.

Supporting carbon sequestration in Oregon's agricultural lands directly aligns with the goals set out in Governor Brown's Executive Order 20-04. Per EO 20-04, ODA must coordinate with the Oregon Global Warming Commission and other agencies "to submit a proposal to the Governor for consideration of adoption of state goals for carbon sequestration and storage by Oregon's natural and working lands, including . . . agricultural lands, based on best available science." SB 404-2 will support this effort.

In order to avoid the most dire impacts of climate change, we need to both aggressively reduce *and* sequester carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions. Soils can act as a crucial carbon sink when managed properly,¹ and a Soil Health Specialist at ODA would

¹ Zomer et al. Global Sequestration Potential of Increased Organic Carbon in Cropland Soils. Scientific Reports (2017). Available at <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-017-15794-8.pdf>.

ensure that farmers have the tools they need to improve soil health on Oregon's agricultural lands. Encouraging biodiversity and healthier soil provides numerous other important benefits as well, such as water infiltration and water holding capacity,² in turn reducing the need for additional inputs including irrigation and both conventional and organic nutrients.

Please support SB 404-2 to uplift Oregon's farming communities and meet Oregon's urgent climate change goals. We respectfully urge you to schedule a work session for this bill to incorporate measures that more directly support the needs of Oregon's farmers, especially those from traditionally underrepresented and underserved communities. Thank you for your consideration and your work toward achieving a climate-smart future for Oregon's agricultural lands.

Sincerely,

Grace Brahler
Oregon Climate Action Plan and Policy Manager
Beyond Toxics

Wendy Mintey
Southern Oregon Environmental Justice Organizer
Beyond Toxics

² Zomer et al.