



FARMWORKER JUSTICE

Judiciary Committee, House of Representatives Farmworker Justice Statement on House Agricultural Immigration Reform Bill

Farmworker Justice supports the Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2019, HR5038, which is under consideration by the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives. The FWMA should be approved by the Judiciary Committee and passed by the full House.

The bipartisan bill resulted from lengthy, complex negotiations led by Rep. Lofgren (D-CA), Chair of the Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship, and Rep. Newhouse (R-WA), a farmer and former Director of Washington State's Department of Agriculture, and additional colleagues. To help reach agreement, Members of Congress involved farmworker advocates, including the United Farm Workers, UFW Foundation, and Farmworker Justice, and agricultural employer trade associations. Farmworker Justice appreciates the scheduling of the markup of the FWMA by the Chair of the Judiciary Committee, Rep. Nadler.

Of utmost importance, the supporters of this legislation recognize the important contributions of farmworkers to our nation's food and agriculture systems. An estimated 2.4 million people labor on our farms and ranches to provide us with fruits, vegetables, milk and other food. This legislation addresses the fundamentally unfair conditions experienced by many farmworkers due to our nation's broken immigration system. The large majority of the nation's farmworkers are immigrants, and a majority lack authorized immigration status. Undocumented farmworkers and their family members live in fear of arrest, deportation and the breakup of their families. In these circumstances, many farmworkers are reluctant to challenge illegal or unfair treatment in their workplaces and their communities. At times, they cannot go to work due to the presence of immigration enforcement agents. The country's farms and our food system depend on immigrants, both documented and undocumented.

The Farm Workforce Modernization Act bill provides a path to lawful permanent residency for undocumented farmworkers and their family members. It would eliminate the constant fear of deportation and family breakup that is so stressful for many farmworker families. Removing the threat of immigration enforcement also would reduce disruptions of farming businesses. With legal status and a path to citizenship, farmworkers would be better able to improve their wages and working conditions and seek enforcement of their labor protections. These improvements would result in a more stable farm labor force and greater food safety and security to the benefit of employers, workers, and consumers. The earned legalization program's requirements are more rigorous and expensive than we would have preferred, but are acceptable in the effort to reach a realistic compromise.

The bill also would revise the existing H-2A agricultural guestworker program to address farmworker and employer concerns with the program. Farmworker advocates have pressed for reforms to reduce widespread abuses under this flawed program, while agricultural employers have lobbied heavily to remove most of its modest labor protections, claiming that the program is unduly expensive and bureaucratic. The bill's lengthy provisions include important new protections for farmworkers, as well as changes to address agricultural employers' concerns. Compromise was necessary to achieve legislation that could become law and address serious harms imposed on farmworker families by our broken immigration system.

Farmworker Justice supports the Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2019 because the bill, if passed, would enable hundreds of thousands of farmworker families to improve significantly their living and working conditions and their participation in our economy and democracy.

Farmworker Justice, based in Washington, D.C., is a national advocacy organization for farmworkers with over thirty-five years of experience serving the farmworker community regarding immigration and labor policy. FJ's website contains extensive information about farmworkers, immigration policy, labor conditions and the H-2A agricultural guestworker program. www.farmworkerjustice.org

Bruce Goldstein, Farmworker Justice, bgoldstein@farmworkerjustice.org

Adrienne DerVartanian, Farmworker Justice, 202-800-2522 adervartanian@farmworkerjustice.org