



Committee on Migration

c/o Migration and Refugee Services, USCCB

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Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

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November 12, 2019

United States House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative,

On behalf of the Committee on Migration and the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, we write to urge you to support H.R. 5038, the Farm Workforce Modernization Act. This bipartisan legislation, introduced on October 30, 2019, by Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) and several Republican and Democratic sponsors, would create an earned legal status program for agricultural workers and would improve the existing H-2A system.

Recognizing the dignity of work of farmworkers and their families is a central concern of the Catholic Church. In his 1981 encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*, Pope John Paul II spoke of the importance of agricultural workers and the need to protect those working in the fields.¹ Farmworkers produce the food that we eat and contribute to the care of our community. Regarding immigrant farmworkers, the bishops in the U.S. have long advocated for reforms of the existing system, including a “legalization program that would help stabilize the workforce, protect migrant workers, and their families from discrimination and exploitation and ensure that these workers are able to continue to make contributions to society.”²

H.R. 5038 proposes a meaningful way for migrant agricultural workers to earn legal status through continued agricultural employment and contributions to the U.S. agricultural economy. It also improves labor protections while producing employment flexibility that is needed to aid our agricultural industries. H.R. 5038 creates more accessible and predictable worker programs while ensuring more worker protections, such as improving the availability of farmworker housing and providing better health protections.

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work), 1981, par. 23. available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html

² See *For I Was Hungry & You Gave Me Food: A Catholic Agenda for Action- Pursuing a More Just Agricultural System- Part 2* available at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/agriculture-nutrition-rural-issues/for-i-was-hungry.cfm>

As currently written, H.R. 5038 is a step in the right direction and reflects genuine bipartisan engagement. We encourage you to consider co-sponsoring this current version of the bill and to move it forward to help ensure a more stable workforce for our farming economy, as well as a tailored earned legalization program and greater worker protections.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Joe Vasquez in black ink.

Most Reverend Joe Vasquez
Bishop of Austin
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Migration

Handwritten signature of Frank J. Dewane in black ink, preceded by a plus sign.

Most Reverend Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of Venice
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Domestic
Justice and Human Development