

Latino Civic Alliance Declares Emergency Response to Protect Agriculture Workers

4.19.2020

Latino Civic Alliance (LCA) is demanding enforceable standards so that the Governor and State of Washington prioritize agriculture workers and protect our food systems during this COVID 19 pandemic. We want equitable treatment with the retail, construction, and technology industry. Washington State is one of the largest agriculture industries in the United States and 99.5% - Ag workforce in Washington State are Latino. This workforce lives below poverty levels, and lacks healthcare benefits, paid sick leave, and decent wages. Agriculture workers consist of field workers, Warehouse, Seafood, Dairy, Poultry, Tree & Fruit, Meat Processing, and these workers contribute to the overall success of the State of Washington. As the largest Statewide Latino advocacy organization and many of our board members come from farmworker families and many of our partners serve farmworkers we are compelled to offer leadership in the midst of this crisis and offer our suggestions and support to implement the following:

1. Adopt emergency rules applicable to the employer to protect farmworkers from exposure to COVID-19.
 - a. These rules would be clear and easy to understand, would be binding, and enforceable.
 - b. These rules would address social distancing, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and sanitation requirements for work, transportation, and housing.
 - i. Sanitation requirements would be practical and easy to follow, with handwashing stations located close to workers with water, soap, and towels.
 - ii. Housing would be required to meet social distancing and sanitation requirements.
 - iii. When transportation is required, it has to have enough room for social distancing and the vehicles must be sanitized.
 - c. These rules would apply to employers of all agricultural workers, including H-2A workers.
 - d. H-2A employers would have to meet all requirements in order to be authorized to bring in H-2A workers.

- e. The employer would be required to report all COVID-19 cases and exposure to their local board of health, who will be required to input into the Washington Disease Reporting System. The State Board of Health would be required to host daily updates and create a community task force, that would include union or farmworker advocates.
2. Require state agencies (LNI, DOH, ESD, and AGR) to enforce compliance with the emergency rules.
3. Require DOH to reinspect all previously licensed housing to ensure compliance with new rules.
4. Designate essential food system workers, including farmworkers as next-in-line for PPE and hygiene supplies, after health care personnel.
5. Require standards for recruitment of local workers. Growers must comply with ESD rules of recruitment workers for this pandemic. Provide recruitment that provides higher wages, paid sick leave, protective equipment, access to transportation. ESD shall reject applications for H-2A workers unless the applicants comply with requirements for housing, workplace safety, transportation, and employment.
6. Regardless of status make sure all workers have access to all the protections and programs, including economic resources such as unemployment, expand sick leave and regardless of waiting period and disaster cash assistance.
7. Require employers to notify workers immediately if the workers have been exposed to COVID-19 and how that exposure happened. If employees are laid off due to exposure and quarantine period provide that they receive paid sick leave and assure that the workforce is not be replaced by H2-A workers.
8. Deploy multi-agency regional teams consisting of Dept of LNI, Department of Health, Employment of Security Department, and Department of Ag, to provide outreach and support to the employer locations and provide support on the spot. State agencies shall increase workforce for this immediate need. All literature must be translated in Spanish and interpreters provided:
 - a. Testing for COVID-19,
 - b. Medical care,
 - c. Housing inspections and assistance
 - d. Quarantine shelter if needed
 - e. Food assistance
 - f. School assistance & childcare

- g. Know your Rights one pager provided to workers and posted at employer sites that includes L&I Toll Free number to report concerns - due to Ag Workers long shifts into the evening or weekends - Toll free number should easily assessible and be fully staffed to receive calls during Harvest until October 31, 2020
- 9. Require regular reporting of metrics by State Agencies regarding their work with employers for compliance.

TO LEARN HOW YOU CAN HELP to Protect Ag workers and our Food System - Please email us at info@latinocivicalliance.org



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