



Farmworkers & Latinx Working Families United

To: Joint Committee on Coronavirus Response  
From: Martha Sonato, PCUN  
Date: March 18, 2020  
RE: Oregon's farmworkers, and Latinx Workers during COVID-19

Co-Chairs Roblan and Holvey and Members of the Committee,

PCUN represents farmworkers and Latinx working families in the Mid-Willamette Valley. In Oregon, there are about 87,000 farmworkers, a majority immigrant dominated sector, with little to no protections in the workplace. PCUN, and its eight sister organizations are taking steps to continue servicing farmworkers, and immigrant families while prioritizing the health and safety of Oregonians.

As the coronavirus spreads exponentially the impacts will touch all of us. We are grateful for the leadership of Governor Brown and local leaders for taking immediate action through emergency declarations and preventative measures to help curb the growth of this pandemic to save lives.

As our communities are rapidly trying to adjust to this outbreak and the measures necessary to slow the spread of the virus we must address the emerging needs and impacts to our economic security and ability to care for our families now to avoid long term or permanent harm.

And while all communities in Oregon will be impacted by this global pandemic, our community is impacted in very specific ways. Today, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused much strife in the lives of Oregonians, and its important to take a deeper look at how workers who are most vulnerable to disruptions due to their seasonal nature, contractors, and temporary labor - especially those who are keeping Oregon's \$50 billion dollar industry working. (includes total sales, and food processing)

As you consider the steps to take to address this crisis, please keep in mind ways to lift up each of our communities. Major concerns on the part of farm labor, and workers at canneries, and processing plants are real - and due to the lack of worker protections, and benefits, in addition to the amount of people power that comes from the immigrant community in this sector - there are many worries on the minds of these workers, on top of the pandemic.

**Immediate actions that can be taken today by government entities, and the industry today to keep our workers, communities, and food supply chain safe includes:**

- Additional training and protocols in Oregon's top ten languages onsite that prioritize deep sanitation, increase sanitation requirements, social distancing, and disinfection.

- Sick days and leave expansion for farmworkers, and food processing workers
- Cash assistance for individuals who do not qualify for paid sick leave, and needing to self quarantine for 14 days. We believe this can be done through Unemployment Insurance, and Worker Compensation. This also includes for Black, Indigenous and People of Color-based small businesses and their respective employees
- Job protection, anti-retaliation protections, and cash assistance for workers over 60 y/o (increasingly aging workforce), additional precautions for workers who are high risk; additional protections for H2A workers (seeing more of these in the fields)
- Taking into consideration the logistical challenges of quarantining workers that live in housing on worksites, and housing with multiple families. Creating avenues and funds for special accommodations for quarantine workers to prioritize health and containment.
- Ensure nutrition programs are still available for children and students despite school closures, and program cancellations. And childcare assistance for parents.
- Timely, trusted, and non-sensationalized multilingual information that is easily shared on communications outlets most utilized by immigrant, and non-english speaking community members.
- Ensuring all workers, small BIPOC business owners, and community members (no matter their documentation status) can access services, including health services.
- Resource migrant clinics in urban and rural Oregon adequately respond to the influx of patients due to COVID-19 and ensure that testing and healthcare is accessible to all workers - no matter their immigration status.
- Resources for farmworker housing and employers to bring in professionals to do “deep-cleaning” of facilities.
- Employers cutting hours or doing layoffs - ensure all workers despite immigration status qualify for services. Removing any barriers for undocumented workers accessing unemployment, and other cash assistance.

**Additional pieces that affect all working Latinx families:**

- Rent forgiveness and moratorium of evictions.
- Supporting homeless workers by getting a contingency plan that can house workers who rely on shelters.
- Funding for organizations serving the most vulnerable. The state government can set-up an emergency fund for non-profit organizations of the state serving immigrants, refugees, day laborers, farmworkers, and people of color to support their capacity in mitigating the community impacts of COVID-19 and providing culturally-relevant education and resources.
- Farmworkers and other sectors of work are of mixed immigration status, all detentions, and ICE holds should end to reduce confinement of workers in close quarters, and to decrease the criminalization of immigrants and people of color.
- Create a grant program providing funds for small businesses owned by black, indigenous, people of color with fewer than 50 employees who see loss of profits due to COVID-19. Provide commercial rent relief during the duration of the administrative closure.
- Ensuring people have access to basic necessities like toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and transportation.

Thank you for your consideration. PCUN looks forward to continuing to work with you on these policy solutions to serve our communities.

Sincerely,  
Martha Sonato, Political Director