

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20515

September 25, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Republican Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Chair  
U.S. House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Kay Granger  
Ranking Member  
U.S. House Appropriations Committee

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chair  
U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Ranking Member  
U.S. House Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Chair Lowey, Ranking Member Granger, Chair DeLauro and Ranking Member Cole:

As you continue negotiations regarding the next COVID-19 response package and fiscal year 2021 government funding, we respectfully request consideration and inclusion of investment in farmworker housing programs in forthcoming legislation.

There are approximately 3 million migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the United States. These essential workers show up to work every day to maintain our domestic food supply. Unfortunately, they also face the greatest housing challenges of all rural people. According to the most recent National Agricultural Workers Survey, 33% of all farmworkers and 45% of migrant farmworkers live in crowded dwellings.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, farmworkers and their families also suffer from poverty. 61% of farmworkers earn incomes below the poverty line. Consequently, three out of every five farmworker families live below the federal poverty line.

The farmworker housing crisis has only been exacerbated by the health and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent reports detail that field workers and packinghouse workers in California have been more prone to contracting COVID-19 due to workplace conditions, lack of personal protective equipment, and lax social distancing.<sup>2</sup> The high prevalence of the disease has been intensified by crowded living conditions within farmworker households. According to the National Center for Farmworker Health, overcrowded

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/news/pdfs/NAWS\\_Research\\_Report\\_13.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/news/pdfs/NAWS_Research_Report_13.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fresnobee.com/news/california/article244769262.html>

and substandard housing conditions are a major concern for COVID-19 to spread through agricultural worker communities, and dormitory-style quarters make quarantining or social distancing efforts nearly impossible.<sup>3</sup>

The only federal program providing outreach and technical assistance to farmworkers is the Department of Labor (DOL) Farmworker Housing Program. Housing assistance is authorized as an eligible activity under section 167 of the Workforce Innovations and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (Public Law 113-128). DOL provides four-year grants to local housing organizations across the nation to assist in the planning development and management of housing for agricultural workers.

However, this program is sorely underfunded. According to the 2016 Legal Services Corporation Agricultural Worker Population Estimate, there are 633,978 agricultural workers in California, representing 21.83% of the nationwide farmworker population and 32.5% of the nation's farmworkers living in poverty.<sup>4</sup> Despite this tremendous need, funding to farmworker organizations based in California fell from \$1.34 million in the previous four-year cycle to \$859,000 in grants made last month; a reduction of over 40%.

In order to address this shortfall and increase the already limited investment in the effort to improve migrant and seasonal farmworker housing, we request an additional \$1 million to current DOL farmworker housing program authorized under WIOA in the next COVID-19 package or funding package.

We urge this request to improve housing and health condition for agricultural workers.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

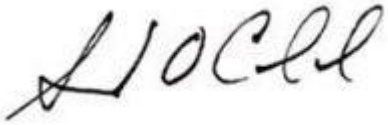


Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.ncfh.org/uploads/3/8/6/8/38685499/msaws\\_and\\_covid-19\\_fact\\_sheet\\_9.9.2020.pdf](http://www.ncfh.org/uploads/3/8/6/8/38685499/msaws_and_covid-19_fact_sheet_9.9.2020.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://lsc-live.app.box.com/s/dfsy78qhagsk12oxi6fr79pd5eq0geqp>



Salud O. Carbajal  
Member of Congress



Jim Costa  
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