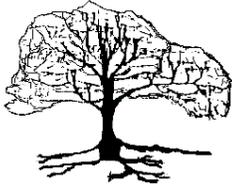


COMITE DE APOYO A LOS TRABAJADORES AGRICOLAS
FARMWORKERS SUPPORT COMMITTEE

C.A.T.A.



**Maryland Senate Finance Committee Hearing
Feb. 27, 2020**

**Written Testimony submitted by:
CATA – The Farmworkers’ Support Committee**

SB 742– SUPPORT

Labor and Employment Fair Recruitment and Transparency Act

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Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

On behalf of CATA – El Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas (The Farmworkers’ Support Committee), I am writing to express support for SB 742, legislation to protect internationally recruited workers in Maryland from labor exploitation and trafficking.

My name is Jessica Culley and I am the General Coordinator for CATA – the Farmworkers’ Support Committee. CATA is a non-profit membership organization of migrant and immigrant farmworkers and low-wage workers in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. We work in Southern New Jersey, Southeastern Pennsylvania and the Delmarva Peninsula, organizing members of our community to fight for better working and living conditions in their workplaces and communities.

We have seen the H-2 programs expand significantly in the past several years in our region. Specifically, our organization has spent time outreaching to farmworkers and our experience has shown us that the living and working conditions of agricultural workers, including those working under the H-2A guest worker program, are already exploitative and need to be addressed through state oversight of these federal programs.

Each year, more than 5000 workers come to work in Maryland on temporary work visas under the H2 programs. These workers are an integral part of our communities and our economy. They work in various industries that contribute to the Maryland economy. They work in crab picking, poultry farming, landscaping – harvesting our vegetables, shoveling our snow and contributing to our local food movement. Abuses in the H2 programs are well documented and experienced widely. Our own outreach in CATA to workers in H2 programs have uncovered workers being charged recruitment fees, suffering widespread discrimination because of gender and age, workers not being paid the promised wages, workers being threatened with dismissal and immigration consequences if they complain and more. As a result of these abuses, guest workers themselves are exploited and Maryland residents working in these industries alongside guest workers, are also often negatively impacted.

When internationally recruited workers suffer abuses, the State of Maryland suffers. By eliminating recruitment fees for work in Maryland, ensuring workers receive a contract at the time of recruitment, and banning discrimination and retaliation, this legislation would combat debt bondage, human trafficking, and other extreme forms of labor exploitation in Maryland.

Through a public registry of recruiters, the bill would root out bad actors and level the playing field for employers who want to do right by their workers. By requiring recruiters to provide workers with an employment contract, this bill would ensure that workers coming to Maryland are fully informed of the terms of their employment before they decide to take a job.

CATA – The Farmworkers' Support Committee strongly encourages you to pass SB 742 and even to consider further action in the future to protect other categories of temporary guest workers. Thank you for making Maryland a place where internationally recruited workers are respected, and workplaces work for all workers.