



MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

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TO: Delegate Dereck E. Davis, Chair
Delegate Kathleen M. Dumais, Vice Chair
Economic Matters Committee Members

FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus (MLLC)

DATE: February 2, 2021

RE: HB577 Health and Welfare of H-2 Visa and Migrant Workers –
COVID-19 Pandemic – Regulations (Healthy Farmworkers Act)

The MLLC supports HB577 Health and Welfare of H-2 Visa and Migrant Workers – COVID-19 Pandemic – Regulations (Healthy Farmworkers Act).

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation that improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a crucial voice in the development of public policy that uplifts the Latino community and benefits the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of HB577.

Agricultural and meat processing industries are successful trades that at times take advantage of their workers. Most of these businesses employ low-income workers who lack access to medical care and paid sick leave. In their endless goal of higher volume and greater efficiency, these corporations knowingly jeopardize workers' safety every day. Agriculture, slaughterhouse and meat processing workers are predominantly Black and Brown individuals and more specifically many are migrant workers.

Approximately [38% of meat processing workers](#) were born outside of the United States, many who are Latin American. Thousands of seasonal workers make up [Maryland's](#) essential agricultural and meat processing industries. Unfortunately, many supervisors use a variety of intimidation tactics to suppress workers' concerns and make it clear that other people are always available to replace them. As a result, workers are forced to accept a hazardous and demeaning work environment if they want to remain employed. Our Maryland migrant workers are more [vulnerable to COVID-19](#) as they work in close quarters, are not provided with personal protective equipment, and sleep in crowded settings in employer-provided bunks and barracks.

HB577 requires the Secretary of Labor to adopt regulations relating to housing, accommodations, safety, health, rights, and welfare of H-2 visa and migrant workers

during the COVID-19 pandemic. These regulations include abiding by CDC recommendations, providing separate living facilities for workers with underlying health conditions and workers who are over 60 years old, and implementing a regular cleaning and disinfecting schedule. Our migrant seasonal workers are essential workers and need protection from this deadly virus. They have provided produce and service while our state froze in the last year. This is the least we can all do for them. If Maryland is going to overcome this health crisis, it must do everything it can to protect everyone in the state.

The MLLC supports this bill and urges a favorable report on HB577.