



**Senate Bill 502 (Senators Carozza, Gallion, Peters, West, Klausmeier, and Ready)
Labor and Employment - Maryland Wage and Hour Law - Agricultural Stands, Retail
Farms, and Farmers' Markets**

Position: Oppose

February 18, 2021

Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee:

On behalf of the coalition Marylanders for Food and Farmworker Protection (MFFWP), we respectfully urge you to oppose Senate Bill 502. MFFWP formed in 2020 to ensure safe and healthy conditions for farm, seafood, and poultry workers in Maryland during the COVID-19 pandemic. This bill would exempt those working at agricultural stands, retail farms, and farmers' markets from the Maryland minimum wage and have a harmful impact on workers.

Food and agricultural workers are often undervalued for the essential role they play in our communities, and they continue to be cut out of laws designed to protect workers. Most agricultural workers are already exempt from Maryland's minimum wage law, which is an injustice that the General Assembly should fix – not exacerbate by passing this legislation to exempt even more agricultural workers.

On March 19, 2020, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security issued a memorandum that declared agricultural workers as essential workers. Indeed, agricultural work is not easy; it can require long hours and exact a physical toll. These workers have made tremendous sacrifices on the COVID-19 frontline. It's not enough to praise essential workers; we must also pay them. And there is no reason to believe this work is easier simply because it is performed on a seasonal basis. In order to build a food system that is equitable and strengthens our local economy, we must value the work of the people that are feeding our communities and ensure that they are able to make ends meet and feed their own families. We should not exempt workers at agricultural stands from minimum wage requirements.

In 2017, according to the [U.S. Department of Labor](#), a quarter of all farm workers had a family income below the official poverty level, while most of the others teetered just above it. [Most of them](#) were forced to rely on at least one public assistance program. A growing body of research highlights that poor-quality or stressful jobs that do not provide adequate compensation may

have a more detrimental impact on health than unemployment.¹ Economic insecurity exacerbates health issues by making it more difficult to access health care and medicine, take time off, and have access to basic necessities. With our current, unprecedented rates of food insecurity and deeply challenging economic conditions, it is even more imperative to ensure that all Maryland workers have what they need to stay healthy and thrive.

For these reasons, we strongly oppose Senate Bill 502 and urge the Committee to give it an UNFAVORABLE report.

Marylanders for Food and Farm Worker Protection includes the following organizations:

CATA – the Farmworkers Support Committee

Center for Progressive Reform

Centros de los Derechos Del Migrante

Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility

Clean Water Action Maryland

Fair Farms

Farmworker Justice

Food & Water Action

Friends of the Earth

Maryland Pesticide Education Network

Migrant Clinicians Network

Public Justice Center

Smart on Pesticides Coalition representing 105 organizations, businesses and institutions

¹ <https://academic.oup.com/ije/article/47/1/47/4079898>