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March 31, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor of California  
State Capitol, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom,

Today we celebrate the birthday of the visionary labor leader and community activist Cesar Chavez. His contribution to the fight for economic and social justice for California's farmworkers underscores the fact that we still have much to accomplish to ensure fair and safe working conditions for these workers. As our state addresses the overwhelming task of combating the coronavirus, we must mitigate the impacts on workers, and in particular, our most vulnerable ones. I am writing to respectfully request the state work to dedicate critical resources to protect the health of California's farmworkers and prevent the spread of coronavirus among them.

California's farmworkers are the backbone of our agricultural economy. Farmworkers are largely undocumented immigrants who enjoy few labor law protections. Many lack health insurance and cannot afford to be sick. Their immigration status prevents them from getting unemployment insurance if they suffer a job loss. Their work is seasonal and by its nature, unstable. Despite all of these challenges, this workforce has helped create a \$54 billion dollar agriculture sector, which our consumers rely on every day.

Our agricultural workforce is subject to a number of conditions that make them particularly vulnerable to the coronavirus. Many farmworkers are in high-risk health categories. They have a high rate of diabetes and may have weakened immune systems due to pesticide and herbicide exposure. Further, it is hard for farmworkers to practice social distancing when many live in crowded labor camps and are bused to the fields. Finally, they have had little to no training on the necessary workplace safety precautions for coronavirus and lack the most basic personal protective equipment such as n95 masks.

In a recent executive order, farmworkers were deemed essential employees working in a critical infrastructure sector. This meant they must go to work, however unsafe the conditions.

### ***What can be done?***

The state should temporarily expand its paid sick leave program from three days to two weeks. If a farmworker is diagnosed with or quarantined due to the coronavirus, they will need more than three days to recover. In addition, in the absence of unemployment insurance or other leave benefits, they cannot afford any prolonged unpaid time off.

When a farmworker is diagnosed with the coronavirus, other farmworkers who were exposed to that worker should be paid to take the number of sick days recommended to self-quarantine. The \$9.5 billion farmers are receiving in federal emergency assistance makes this step affordable.

We must immediately direct the allocation of more masks to this sector. Given that this population has a number of high-risk health factors, the state must get them the proper protective equipment they need to harvest our fields safely.

State law already requires that farmworkers who are pesticide applicators receive employer-provided protective gear. However, there are reports that due to the shortage of masks, some employers are not providing pesticide applicators with masks. Harmful pesticides should not be used unless farmworkers have the necessary state and federally mandated personal protective equipment.

Finally, to express appreciation for workers' essential services, some employers are providing hazard pay for employees who must labor to keep us healthy, safe and fed. Thousands of retail food workers are getting an extra \$2 to \$3 an hour. The state should work to ensure that farmworkers receive hazard pay just as their counterparts.

To put it simply, as we honor the legacy of Cesar Chavez and the economic and social contributions of farmworkers we should take these necessary and key steps to protect farmworkers from this devastating illness.

I appreciate your taking into consideration my concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like to discuss this further.

Sincerely,



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