



December 4, 2020

Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom:

On behalf of the CA Latino Legislative Caucus, we write to thank you for your work to ensure an equitable distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine and for including farmworkers in Phase 1 of the Vaccination Plan. Given the extraordinary role that farmworkers play in our state and the health challenges they face in the commission of their work we request that farmworkers be prioritized in Phase 1B of your vaccine rollout.

Farmworkers are the backbone of our state's \$50 billion agriculture industry and, notwithstanding their vulnerability to COVID-19, have not stopped working during the pandemic. Whether due to overcrowded and multigenerational housing, the lack of health insurance or protective equipment, and/or absence of safe space to quarantine, farmworkers are at higher-risk of contracting COVID-19. Additionally, 97% of the state's agricultural industry workers are Latino. The Latino community has been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 infections and deaths. Protecting our farmworkers benefits all of our residents by helping prevent labor shortages, keeping the food supply strong, and improving public health by minimizing the number of agriculture-related COVID-19 cases. Prioritizing farmworkers in the Vaccination Plan is also helpful to farmers and growers, who depend on farmworker labor to meet the demand of California's massive agricultural industry.

COVID-19 outbreaks amongst agricultural employees have become far too common. Nationwide, at least 145,000 farmworkers have tested positive. A forthcoming statewide report estimates that 15,774 of those cases come from right here in California. The largest outbreak in the state happened at a Foster Farms plant in Merced County, where 392 employees tested positive for COVID-19. Sadly, these numbers likely underestimate the breadth of the problem since they exclude temporary and foreign labor.

These troubling statistics demonstrate the urgent need to prioritize farmworkers in Phase 1 of the preliminary three-phase rollout that you have presented. Specifically, we request that you prioritize farmworkers in the 'essential workers' category, 1-B, right behind healthcare professionals that are at higher risk of COVID-19 exposure (1-A). Further, the Vaccination Plan should have a farmworker specific component developed by agriculture data experts, community outreach experts, and community-based organizations. When the pandemic first hit, language and cultural barriers limited the effectiveness of educational outreach to the farmworker community. To avoid similar problems and ensure the successful

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distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine we must have a rollout that is culturally and linguistically sensitive to the needs of our diverse labor force. Lastly, the Vaccination Plan must include undocumented immigrants who are often afraid to seek government aid if it may jeopardize their residency in the country. All farmworkers must be equipped with the tools necessary to make their own personal and informed decision when a vaccine is available.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We trust that you will take the appropriate action to prioritize farmworkers in Phase 1 of the Vaccination Plan not only to protect our food supply but also the essential workers that support it. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,



MARIA ELENA DURAZO
Chair, CA Latino Legislative Caucus
Senator, 24th District



ROBERT RIVAS
Vice Chair, CA Latino Legislative Caucus
Assemblymember, 30th District