



August 21, 2020

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

RE: Need for N-95 Masks to Protect Farmworkers During Current Wildfire Crisis

Dear Governor Newsom:

As dangerous levels of smoke and ash blanket much of our state, many of us have the luxury of following expert recommendations and staying inside. Unfortunately, for the hundreds of thousands of farmworkers still hard at work in the fields, inhaling toxic air and risking long-term health complications has become a daily routine. **We write to urge your administration to guarantee that all California farmworkers have access to high-quality N-95 masks for the duration of the current air quality crisis caused by the dozens of wildfires burning in our state.**

The recent spate of wildfires has coincided with the harvest period for many important crops, a tragic coincidence that has left farmworkers working harder than ever in the fields even as experts declare the air unsafe to breathe. Air pollutants such as particulate matter can cause inflammation, disruption of the immune system, and a number of other serious health issues. Continued exposure to these pollutants increase the risk of contracting and ultimately dying from COVID-19; an urgent concern for a population already at an elevated risk of infection.

While Cal/OSHA regulations¹ require agricultural employers to provide farmworkers with protective equipment, N-95 masks are so few and far between that any individual employer is almost certainly unable to procure enough to protect all of their workers. While we applaud the Secretary of Food & Agriculture's recently announced plans to distribute one million masks to farmworkers around the state, that amount will only last so long. In Monterey County, for example, the promised 80,000 masks will meet less than one week's worth of need. Given that containment of the current wildfire crisis will take at least two weeks, with more fires expected in the future, unhealthy air conditions will persist and a more comprehensive solution is needed.

¹ Department of Industrial Relations "Protection from Wildfire Smoke" rule, 8 C.C.R., §5141.1 (2020).

We look forward to working with you to ensure that all farmworkers are able to remain safe and healthy through the current crisis and beyond. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to any of us directly. Your staff can also reach Spencer Jones, Chief of Staff for Assemblymember Robert Rivas, at spencer.jones@asm.ca.gov or (916) 319-2030. Thank you for your prompt attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,



ROBERT RIVAS
Assemblymember
30th District



RUDY SALAS
Assemblymember
32nd District



MONIQUE LIMON
Assemblymember
37th District



BILL MONNING
Senator
17th District



MARIA ELENA DURAZO
Senator
24th District



ELOISE GOMEZ REYES
Assemblymember
47th

cc: The Honorable Anthony Rendon, Speaker, California State Assembly
The Honorable Toni Atkins, President Pro Tem, California State Senate
The Honorable Lorena Gonzalez, Chair, Latino Caucus, California Legislature
The Honorable Maria Elena Durazo, Vice-Chair, Latino Caucus, California Legislature
The Honorable Jerry Hill, Chair, Committee on Labor, Public Employment, and Retirement, California State Senate
The Honorable Ash Kalra, Chair, Committee on Labor and Employment, California State Assembly
Secretary Juli Su, California Labor and Workforce Development Agency
Katrina Hagen, Director, Department of Industrial Relations
Douglas Parker, Chief, Division of Occupational Safety and Health
Karen Ross, Secretary, California Department of Food & Agriculture