
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anthony Portantino, Chair
2021 - 2022 Regular Session

SB 558 (Caballero) - Farmworker Disaster Relief Planning Task Force

Version: April 22, 2021

Policy Vote: HEALTH 10 - 0, HUMAN S.
5 - 0

Urgency: No

Mandate: No

Hearing Date: May 17, 2021

Consultant: Janelle Miyashiro

Bill Summary: SB 558 establishes the Farmworker Disaster Relief Planning Task Force within the Office of Emergency Services to examine and make recommendations on the health care, safety net service, and other social and economic relief needs of farmworkers, their families, and their communities' during pandemics and disasters.

Fiscal Impact: The Office of Emergency Services (OES) anticipates costs of approximately \$630,000 (General Fund) to establish and to provide administrative support to the task force.

Background: California's 800,000 farmworkers play a key role in sustaining California's \$50 billion agricultural industry and the production of America's fresh food supply. Roughly 90 percent of California farmworkers were born outside the United States, mostly in Mexico and Central America.

Latinos in the United States have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Farmworkers in particular have faced higher exposure to COVID-19 than other workers due to exposure in the fields, during their commute to work, and in overcrowded housing with their co-workers, families and other community members.

Additionally, prior disasters that have particularly harmed farmworkers and their communities include conditions related to climate change such as drought and wildfires. Droughts have affected the farmworker communities through loss of jobs and lack of access to or loss of potable water. Farmworkers reportedly had difficulty accessing some programs intended to remediate those problems due to immigration status, language barriers, residing in remote and rural communities, and having working hours that coincide with assistance programs' operational hours.

Proposed Law:

- Establishes the Farmworker Disaster Relief Planning Task Force in the OES.
- Requires the task force to examine the needs of farmworkers, their families, and their communities or immediate, intermediate, and long-term sustainable and equitable access to health care, safety net services, protections, and other social and economic relief during pandemics and disasters.
- Requires the task force to create a stakeholder process that facilitates public input; research and investigate the disparate impact of disasters and pandemics on farmworkers, their families, and their communities; research and investigate

legislative, regulatory, and private sector forms of relief that can provide immediate, intermediate, long-term sustainable and equitable access to health care, safety net services, protections, and other social and economic relief for farmworkers and their families; and provide recommendations about relief programs.

- Requires the task force to report its findings and recommendations on or before January 1, 2023.
- Specifies the task force be composed of 19 or more representative from the Office of the Governor; Labor and Workforce Development Agency; OES; Business, Consumer Services, and Housing Agency; Department of Food and Agriculture; and other state agencies that support farmworkers.
- Specifies four representatives be appointed by the Governor:
 - One member representing a community-based organization that serves farmworkers; one member who represents a local agricultural association; one member who is an agricultural commissioner; and one member who is a policy expert in the field of farmworker health and safety.
- Specifies four representatives be appointed by the Senate Pro Tempore and four representatives be appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly each as follows:
 - One member representing a community-based organization that serves farmworkers; one member representing a bona fide labor organization; one member who is a locally elected official representing a city or county in which agriculture is a dominant industry; and one current or former farmworker.
- Authorizes only task force members who are, or have been, farmworkers to receive reimbursement for travel, per diem, or other expenses.
- Specifies that task force meetings must comply with the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act.
- Requires governmental agencies participating in the task force to operate within its existing budgetary resources.
- Requires OES to produce an actuarial report of the task force recommendations and submit the report no later than October 1, 2023.
- Repeals the task force on January 1, 2024.

Staff Comments: The bill requires state agencies to operate within their existing budgets in relation to their participation on the task force and prohibits state agency task force members from receiving reimbursement for travel, per diem, or other expenses. Additionally, the bill does not specify how often the task force is required to meet. To the extent that these costs are not absorbable within existing resources, participating state agencies may need additional resources to participate on the task force or perform other task force-related duties.