Date of Hearing: March 24, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY AND TOXIC MATERIALS
Damon Connolly, Chair
AB 1600 (Arambula) – As Introduced January 16, 2026

SUBJECT: Disadvantaged communities: farmworker communities

SUMMARY: Adds—to existing state law that requires the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) to identify disadvantaged communities for Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) investment opportunities—an authorization for CalEPA to include farmworker communities, as specified, in its criteria. Specifically, **this bill**:

1) Adds—to existing state law that requires CalEPA to identify disadvantaged communities for GGRF investment opportunities based on specified criteria—an authorization for CalEPA to include, in its criteria, farmworker communities that meet both of the following:

   a) The communities are located in geographic areas with a significant presence of agricultural workers, particularly those engaged in seasonal or migrant labor; and,

   b) Residents in the communities are disproportionately exposed to environmental pollutants related to agricultural or industrial operations.

2) Requires CalEPA, in consultation with the California Department of Community Services and Development (CSD) and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), to revise applicable screening tools and guidance documents, to ensure the inclusion of farmworker communities as disadvantaged communities in all relevant program eligibility determinations and benefit calculations.

EXISTING LAW:

1) Establishes the GGRF, and requires all moneys collected by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) under the state's Cap-and-Invest Program to be deposited into the GGRF. (Government Code (GC) § 16428.8)

2) Provides that it is the intent of the Legislature that GGRF moneys shall only be appropriated in a manner consistent with state laws governing the GGRF, including the GGRF Investment Plan and Communities Revitalization Act. (Health and Safety Code (HSC) § 39712(a)(1))

3) Requires CalEPA to identify disadvantaged communities for GGRF investment opportunities; requires these communities to be identified based on geographic, socioeconomic, public health, and environmental hazard criteria; provides that the criteria may include, but are not limited to, either of the following:

   a) Areas disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards that can lead to negative public health effects, exposure, or environmental degradation; and,

   b) Areas with concentrations of people that are of low-income, high unemployment, low levels of homeownership, high rent burden, sensitive populations, or low levels of educational attainment. (HSC § 39711)

4) Requires that the GGRF investment plan allocate a minimum of 25% of GGRF moneys to projects located within the boundaries of, and benefiting individuals living in, disadvantaged communities identified by CalEPA, as specified; a minimum of 5% to projects that benefit low-income households or to projects located within the boundaries of, and benefiting individuals living in, low-income communities located anywhere in the state; and a minimum of 5% to projects that either benefit low-income households that are outside of, but within one-half mile of, disadvantaged communities, or to projects located within the boundaries of, and benefiting individuals living in, low-income communities that are outside of, but within one-half mile of, disadvantaged communities. (HSC § 39713(a-c))

5) Requires CARB to ensure that greenhouse gas emission reduction rules, regulations, programs, mechanisms, and incentives under its jurisdiction, where applicable and to the extent feasible, direct public and private investment toward the most disadvantaged communities in California and provide an opportunity for small businesses, schools, affordable housing associations, and other community institutions to participate in and benefit from statewide efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. (HSC § 38565)

6) Requires CSD to develop and administer the Energy Efficiency Low-Income Weatherization Program (LIWP); authorizes CSD to develop requirements, guidelines, and subgrantee contract provisions for LIWP, as specified; requires, before a subgrantee contract is executed for the provision of local service, CSD to post draft program guidelines on CSD's website and to hold a public hearing to obtain public input on the draft program guidelines, as specified. (GC § 12087.5)

7) Requires that $10 million of Proposition (Prop) 4 funds be made available, upon appropriation by the Legislature, as part of the Farmworker Housing Component of LIWP, to low-income farmworker households for no-cost energy efficiency upgrades designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by saving energy; requires that these upgrades include, but are not limited to, insulation, central heating and cooling system upgrades, lighting upgrades, and window replacement. (Public Resources Code § 93580)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill: According to the author:

> "Farmworkers should be treated with dignity and respect reflective of the essential contribution they make to California's agricultural economy and local communities. Every day, they face the compounding burdens of extreme heat, pesticide exposure, substandard housing, and environmental degradation, conditions that are only worsening as climate change intensifies. These are the workers who sustain California's over $100 billion agricultural economy, yet they remain structurally excluded from some of the very climate programs designed to help communities like theirs.
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> For example, California's climate investment framework prioritizes disadvantaged communities (DACs) for funding through the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF). However, because DAC designation is tied to CalEnviroScreen scoring thresholds, many rural and unincorporated farmworker communities fall outside eligibility boundaries, even when facing clear environmental and socioeconomic vulnerability. This bill addresses this

deficiency in state law by expressly designating farmworker housing as DACs, making them eligible for funding that can be used to improve their communities."

California Climate Investments, GGRF, and investments in priority populations: Since 2014, the Legislature has appropriated billions of dollars in California Climate Investments—funded by auction proceeds from the state's Cap-and-Invest Program, deposited into the GGRF—to fund projects that reduce harmful emissions, protect public health, strengthen local economies, and support natural environments.

State law established under SB 535 (De León, Chapter 830, Statutes of 2012) and AB 1550 (Gomez, Chapter 369, Statutes of 2016) targets a portion of these investments to frontline communities, by requiring CalEPA to identify disadvantaged communities and mandating the allocation of 35% of GGRF dollars to disadvantaged communities, low-income communities, and low-income households, which the state collectively refers to as priority populations. Priority populations include all of the following:

1) Disadvantaged communities, comprised of:

   a) The top 25% of census tracts experiencing disproportionate amounts of pollution, environmental degradation, and socioeconomic and public health conditions according to CalEnviroScreen (described below);

   b) Census tracts lacking overall scores in CalEnviroScreen due to data gaps, but receiving the highest 5% of CalEnviroScreen "Pollution Burden" composite scores;

   c) Census tracts identified in 2017 as disadvantaged, regardless of their CalEnviroScreen scores; and,

   d) Lands under the control of federally recognized Tribes.

2) Low-income communities and households, which have incomes either at or below 80% of the statewide median, or below a threshold designated as "low-income" by the California Department of Housing and Community Development.

CalEnviroScreen: CalEnviroScreen is a science-based mapping tool developed by the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) and CalEPA, to help identify California communities that are most affected by multiple sources of pollution, as well as communities that may be especially vulnerable to pollution's effects. Among other things, the state uses the tool to identify California's most environmentally burdened and vulnerable communities; assist CalEPA's boards and departments with decisions involving grant allocations and prioritization of resources and cleanup activities; and target GGRF dollars to disadvantaged communities.

CalEnviroScreen uses environmental, health, and socioeconomic data—compiled in the form of "indicators"—from state and federal government sources to produce a numerical score for each census tract in the state. Scores are intended to show relative pollution burdens among communities, with higher scores indicating greater levels of pollution burden and vulnerability. CalEnviroScreen relies on two groups of indicators, listed below, to generate these scores.

Pollution burden indicators	Air quality (ozone), air quality (PM2.5), children's lead risk from housing, diesel

	particulate matter, drinking water contaminants, pesticide use, toxic releases from facilities, traffic impacts, cleanup sites, groundwater threats, hazardous waste generators and facilities, impaired water bodies, and solid waste sites and facilities
Population characteristic indicators	Asthma, cardiovascular disease, low birth weight infants, educational attainment, housing burden, linguistic isolation, poverty, and unemployment

CalEnviroScreen 4.0, released in October 2021, is the most current version of the tool, although OEHHA announced in January 2026 the release of a draft CalEnviroScreen 5.0 update. According to OEHHA, the draft incorporates recent census tract and data updates, refined methodologies, and input from community-based organizations. In addition, the draft 5.0 update introduces two new indicators—diabetes prevalence and small air toxic sites—and, pursuant to requirements in AB 1059 (Garcia, Chapter 584, Statutes of 2015), brings in information to incorporate pollution concerns from the California-Mexico border region.

Notably, for CalEnviroScreen 5.0, OEHHA partnered with community-based organizations to co-design key updates and support meaningful community engagement in the development process. In the report, "Mapping local knowledge and experiences: Co-designing proposed updates to CalEnviroScreen with California communities," OEHHA makes the following statement about the outcomes and value of this co-design process:

> "This co-design process marked a major step forward in how OEHHA works with communities. Instead of just asking for feedback, OEHHA partnered with [community-based organizations (CBOs)] as equal collaborators to inform proposed updates to CalEnviroScreen. This helps ensure that CalEnviroScreen 5.0 better reflects the real environmental and health experiences faced by communities across California. Together, OEHHA and our partner CBOs worked on three key projects: identifying proposed updates to CalEnviroScreen's data and indicators, improving its reach and accessibility, and creating a community engagement plan for the Version 5.0 update. These efforts led to several proposed changes to CalEnviroScreen for continued public feedback, including a new indicator that combines oil and gas well data with small air pollution sources, a larger buffer zone around hazardous waste facilities, and the addition of diabetes prevalence as a health indicator."

Farmworkers face multiple socioeconomic and environmental burdens: Surveys of California's farmworkers reveal that they face major challenges, including pesticide exposure, poverty, educational barriers, linguistic isolation, housing and food insecurity, difficult working conditions, and poor healthcare access. As noted above, a number of these factors are captured as indicators in CalEnviroScreen, suggesting that farmworker communities may be at the nexus of many of the pollution and socioeconomic indicators that the state uses to identify disadvantaged communities.

In one 2022 study, "The intersection of workplace and environmental exposure on health in Latinx farm working communities in rural inland southern California" (published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*), researchers from the University of California, Riverside state that pesticides, "while contributing to increases in crop yields, also contribute to poor health conditions among farmworkers who have considerably higher exposure to pesticides than non-agricultural workers, increasing their risk for skin disease, vision problems, and respiratory-associated illness." Drawing on interviews from their study participants, the authors also state:

> "Participants extensively discussed the impact agricultural labor has on their physical health, ranging from headaches to hearing loss from noisy machinery to musculoskeletal conditions (e.g., foot and knee injuries from standing or kneeling for extensive hours; pain, swelling, heel spurs, knee effusions, trouble walking, etc.), back and sciatic nerve pain from heavy lifting, deviated discs, muscle sprains, and fractures. They also discussed skin conditions related to workplace exposures (e.g., itchiness, rashes, eczema, warts from sharing gloves at work, skin allergies, and skin cancers). Although the consensus was that working long hours in the heat and under the sun's rays was a major contributor to chronic health conditions, participants agreed that exposure to dust, soil, pesticides and chemicals used on the fields either caused or exacerbated these skin conditions and contributed to the respiratory and vision problems they and their families experienced (e.g., asthma, nasal allergies, infections, bronchitis, burning eyes, etc.)."

In 2022, the United States Department of Labor released "California Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) 2015-2019," (NAWS Report) a report detailing findings based on data collected from face-to-face interviews with 3,582 California farmworkers between October 2015 and September 2019. Among its findings, the NAWS Report showed that:

1) 96% of California farmworkers were Hispanic;

2) 80% said they felt most comfortable conversing in Spanish, and 84% said either that they could not speak English "at all" or that they could speak English "a little" or "somewhat";

3) 35% lived in crowded dwellings; and,

4) Farmworkers' average personal income was between $20,000-$24,999, although one third of surveyed farmworkers stated that they had earned less than $20,000 in the previous year.

In another 2022 survey—"Farmworker health in California: Health in a time of contagion, drought, and climate change," conducted by CDPH and the University of California, Merced—researchers found that:

1) Almost one in five farmworkers experienced, at one point or another, not being paid wages they had earned by an employer;

2) 42% reported very low or low food security;

3) More than one in three reported difficulties keeping their home cool;

4) More than half exhibited blood test results indicating pre-diabetic or diabetic conditions;

5) 42% had blood test values indicating concerning chronic inflammatory changes; and,

6) Nearly half reported being without health insurance at some point within the last 12 months.

Investments in farmworker households via LIWP: One of the California Climate Investments, LIWP reduces household energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions by funding energy efficiency upgrades and rooftop solar photovoltaic systems, at no cost to low-income households. Since its inception in 2014, LIWP has received funding from GGRF, the state's General Fund, and, most recently, the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024, which, once approved by voters (via Proposition 4), authorized the issuance of $10 million to the Farmworker Housing Component of LIWP.

According to CSD, which oversees LIWP, farmworkers are one of the most vulnerable populations in the state because of seasonal employment and low wages. Farmworker families also spend a larger share of their annual income on home energy, and often cut back on other critical needs to pay their energy bills. Launched in 2019, the LIWP Farmworker Housing Component provides services to low-income farmworker households and is administered by La Cooperativa Campesina de California, which collaborates with a team of partner organizations to enroll eligible farmworker households and install energy saving and solar measures in single-family dwellings and buildings of 2-4 units. To be eligible, a household must 1) live in a single-family home or stand-alone building with two to four units; 2) include a verified farmworker or farmworker family; and 3) meet the definition of a low-income household (i.e., a household that does not exceed the higher of either 80% of the Area Median Income for its county, or 80% of the State Median Income), or have verified enrollment in certain public assistance programs.

CSD's guidelines specify that LIWP's service delivery area is made up of the following 18 counties, selected to target resources to areas of the state with the highest populations of farmworkers: Sonoma, Napa, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Kern, Ventura, Riverside, San Diego, and Imperial counties. Altogether, these counties represent 80% of California's farmworker population. From 2017-2025, cumulative LIWP investments in these counties ranged from $745,318 (Napa County) to $7.4 million (Riverside County). Total LIWP investment in the Farmworker Housing Component for this time period was $50.2 million.

This bill: AB 1600 authorizes CalEPA to include farmworker communities in its criteria for identifying disadvantaged communities for GGRF investment opportunities. In addition, AB 1600 requires CalEPA to revise applicable screening tools to ensure the inclusion of farmworker communities as disadvantaged communities in program eligibility and benefit determinations. Proponents of the bill state that, among other things, AB 1600 would expand farmworkers' access to California Climate Investments by ensuring that the multiple pollution and socioeconomic burdens farmworkers face are taken into consideration in CalEnviroScreen and its use as a tool for identifying disadvantaged communities. As AB 1600 moves forward, it may be worth considering how this bill might expand farmworkers' access to programs such as LIWP, which allocates funds to priority populations based on low-income status, rather than their designation as disadvantaged communities.

Arguments in support: According to La Cooperativa Campesina de California:

> "Every day, California’s farmworkers face the compounding burdens of extreme heat, pesticide exposure, substandard housing, and environmental degradation—conditions that are

only worsening as climate change intensifies…While CalEnviroScreen was built to capture urban pollution burdens, it was not designed to reflect the realities of farmworker life: agricultural labor concentration, rural pesticide exposure, substandard housing in unincorporated areas, and extreme heat vulnerability. As a result, many farmworker dense communities in counties such as Monterey, Napa, Sonoma, and Mendocino do not score high enough to qualify for the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) benefits they deserve.

AB 1600 does not replace or dismantle CalEnviroScreen; instead, it corrects a structural gap by explicitly including farmworker communities in the statutory definition of [disadvantaged communities]. This simple but powerful change would:

- Expand access to the Low-Income Weatherization Program and other energy efficiency investments that reduce utility costs for farmworker families;

- Improve eligibility for climate resilience programs in rural agricultural regions experiencing rising temperatures and prolonged fire seasons;

- Increase access to clean transportation options that reduce both emissions and financial burden for farmworkers;

- Strengthen water infrastructure for communities relying on small water systems vulnerable to contamination and drought.

California has long been at the forefront of the nation regarding climate action and environmental justice. However, leadership is insignificant if its benefits do not extend to the populations most vulnerable to climate change's adverse effects. Assembly Bill 1600 represents both a moral obligation and a concrete measure towards realizing the commitments established by AB 32 (Núñez, 2006), SB 535 (De León, 2012), and AB 1550 (Gómez, 2016)."

Arguments in opposition: None on file.

Related legislation:

1) SB 867 (Allen, Chapter 83, Statutes of 2024). Enacted the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024, which, once approved by voters (via Prop 4), authorized the issuance of bonds in the amount of $10 billion, including $10 million for the Farmworker Housing Component of the LIWP.

2) AB 1232 (Gloria, Chapter 754, Statutes of 2019). Directed CSD, by January 1, 2021, to provide an action plan that, among other things, ensures greater cross-referral between public health agencies, CDPH's Office of Health Equity, and the LIWP for comprehensive energy and healthy home improvements for low-income multifamily residents in disadvantaged communities; directed CSD, by January 1, 2023 and in coordination with relevant agencies, to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the Multi-Family Energy Efficiency and Renewables program component of LIWP; and clarified that an eligible expenditure of GGRF money appropriated to the CSD may occur over multiple fiscal years and that CSD may make multiyear funding commitments.

3) AB 1550 (Gómez, Chapter 369, Statutes of 2016). Requires that at least 25% of GGRF be allocated toward disadvantaged communities; at least 5% toward projects within low-income communities or benefiting low-income households; and at least 5% toward projects within and benefiting low-income communities, or low-income households, that are outside of, but within one half mile of, a disadvantaged community.

4) AB 2715 (E. Garcia, 2016). Would have directed CSD to develop and administer an Agricultural Working Poor Energy Efficient Housing Program to improve energy efficiency in farmworker-owned housing. This bill died on the suspense file in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

5) AB 1059 (E. Garcia, Chapter 584, Statutes of 2015). Required OEHHA, in its next CalEnviroScreen update, or not later than January 1, 2017, to report to the Legislature on specified data necessary for updating CalEnviroScreen indicators for communities in the California-Mexico border region; requires OEHHA, when such data of sufficient quality are available, to include the data in the next CalEnviroScreen update.

6) AB 862 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 36, Statutes of 2014). Required CSD to develop and administer LIWP.

7) SB 535 (De León, Chapter 830, Statutes of 2012). Requires CalEPA to identify disadvantaged communities for GGRF investment opportunities, as specified; required the GGRF investment plan to allocate at least 25% of available moneys in the fund to projects that provide benefits to identified disadvantaged communities, and at least 10% of available moneys to projects located within identified disadvantaged communities.

8) AB 32 (Núñez, Chapter 488, Statutes of 2006). Requires, among other things, that CARB ensure that greenhouse gas emission reduction rules, regulations, programs, mechanisms, and incentives under its jurisdiction direct public and private investment toward the most disadvantaged communities in California and provide an opportunity for small businesses, schools, affordable housing associations, and other community institutions to participate in and benefit from statewide efforts to reduce emissions.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

LA Cooperativa Campesina De California (Sponsor)
California Human Development
Center for Employment Training
Central Valley Opportunity Center
Comité De Acción Del Valle INC
Los Amigos De LA Comunidad, INC.
Proteus INC.

Opposition

None on file.

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