

Date of Hearing: April 8, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 1600 (Arambula) – As Amended March 17, 2026

Policy Committee: Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials Vote: 5 - 1

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: No Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill expands the definition of “disadvantaged communities” (DACs) in the Health and Safety Code by explicitly authorizing the inclusion of farmworker communities that meet certain requirements.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Authorizes the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) – as part of an existing requirement to identify DACs for Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) investment opportunities – to include farmworker communities that meet the following requirements:
 - a) The communities are located in geographic areas with a significant presence of agricultural workers, particularly those engaged in seasonal or migrant labor.
 - 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 DACs in all relevant program eligibility determinations and benefit calculations.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) CalEPA will incur costs to revise applicable screening tools and guidance documents to ensure the inclusion of farmworker communities as DACs in all relevant program eligibility determinations and benefit calculations. While the agency will almost certainly incur costs to do this work in the near term, it is not clear to this committee that the agency will incur the same level of costs to do the work ongoing.

For its part, CalEPA notes it expects to work through the Air Resources Board (ARB) to implement this bill. ARB estimates ongoing annual staff workload costs of approximately \$779,000 (GGRF) to hire staff to implement this bill in coordination with CalEPA. Current law requires ARB to develop funding guidelines and include guidance to agencies that administer “California Climate Investments” (CCI) programs on how to maximize benefits to DACs. ARB also develops criteria and tools to ensure administering agencies accurately

report the benefits of GGRF-funded projects to priority populations. ARB is also responsible for conducting outreach in DACs to inform community members about investment opportunities available through CCIs. Therefore, ARB contends it will require dedicated staff to update existing materials, develop new materials specific to farmworker communities, provide guidance to administering agencies as they navigate reporting under the updated DAC criteria, and engage in outreach and engagement with farmworker communities.

- 2) The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), which created and manages CalEnviroScreen (CES) – a science-based mapping tool to identify DACs based on geographic, socioeconomic, public health, and environmental hazard criteria – will incur costs to implement this bill. While the office will almost certainly incur costs to do this work in the near term, it is not clear to this committee that the office will incur the same level of cost ongoing.

For its part, OEHHA estimates ongoing annual costs of approximately \$205,000 for one position and \$300,000 in one-time contracting funds (GGRF) to incorporate farmworker communities in the definition of DAC and to update CES. Tasks include identifying and integrating appropriate data sets and methods for accurately identifying farmworker communities, engaging with environmental justice and farmworker communities and academic experts, and conducting an off-cycle update to CES. As discussed below, OEHHA released a draft of CES 5.0 in January 2026 after hosting multiple workshops and webinars and engaging with diverse stakeholders. OEHHA is in the process of responding to public comment and plans to finalize the tool for release in late spring or early summer. This bill may require OEHHA to redo or restart the CES update process to reflect the changes proposed by this bill.

- 3) CSD anticipates minor and absorbable costs to consult with CalEPA.
- 4) Costs of an unknown, likely minor, amount for CDPH to consult with CalEPA.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

[Farmworker] remain structurally excluded from some of the very climate programs designed to help communities like theirs. For example, California's climate investment framework prioritizes [DACs] for funding through [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.

- 2) **Background. CES.** CES is a science-based mapping tool developed by OEHHA and CalEPA to help identify California communities most affected by multiple sources of pollution, as well as communities that may be especially vulnerable to the effects of pollution. The state uses the tool to, among other things, 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 DACs. CES 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 CES 5.0 update.

CCIs. Since 2014, the Legislature has appropriated billions of dollars in CCIs – funded by auction proceeds from the state's cap-and-invest program, deposited into GGRF – to fund projects that reduce harmful emissions, protect public health, strengthen local economies, and support natural environments. State law targets a portion of these investments to DACs by requiring CalEPA to identify DACs and mandating the allocation of 35% of GGRF dollars to DACs, low-income communities, and low-income households.

Farmworkers. Surveys of California's farmworkers reveal they face major challenges, including pesticide exposure, poverty, educational barriers, linguistic isolation, housing and food insecurity, difficult working conditions, groundwater threats, and poor healthcare access. A number of these factors are captured as indicators in CES, suggesting that farmworker communities may be at the nexus of many of the pollution and socioeconomic indicators the state uses to identify DACs.

Low-Income Weatherization Program (LIWP). 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 and the General Fund, and, most recently, the Proposition 4 climate bond authorized the issuance of \$10 million to the Farmworker Housing Component of LIWP. The LIWP Farmworker Housing Component focuses on the direct installation of energy efficiency measures and solar photovoltaic systems for eligible farmworker households at no cost to the household. The LIWP Farmworker Housing Component is administered by La Cooperativa Campesina de California and currently provides services in 18 counties that have the highest farmworker populations. According to CSD, this program does not use CES to determine project or household eligibility. The 2021, 2022, and 2023 budget acts appropriated a combined \$105 million in GGRF and General Fund resources to support the Farmworker Housing and Multifamily Housing Components of LIWP.

This bill is sponsored by La Cooperativa Campesina de California, which argues farmworker communities “are structurally excluded from the very climate programs designed to help communities like theirs.” The organization contends the root of this inequity lies in CES:

While [CES] 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 [GGRF] benefits they deserve.