

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 1890 (Aguiar-Curry)
As Amended March 10, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Increases the amount of funding the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) awards to the Napa County Housing Authorities (NCHA) farmworker centers from \$250,000 to \$500,000, annually.

Major Provisions

- 1) Provides that funding for this program is contingent upon an appropriation in the Budget.
- 2) Provides that funding provided to NCHA shall not be used to house H-2A workers, and any employer that utilizes Napa County farmworker centers to house H-2A workers is required to reimburse the state for the cost.

COMMENTS

Napa Farmworker Housing: Napa County's economy is based largely on its \$1 billion agriculture industry, the value of which arises almost exclusively from its wine grape crops. This creates a massive demand for farmworkers in the county, and a related need for housing to support these migrant workers. Farmworkers frequently face significant barriers to accessing stable and affordable housing, particularly in regions like Napa County, where housing costs are high and supply is limited.

To address the housing needs of the farmworker workforce, Napa County operates farmworker housing centers that provide dormitory style housing to migrant farmworkers. Napa County's farmworker centers are different from the other farmworker centers in California. HCD operates the Office of Migrant Services (OMS) program, which manages state-owned farm worker housing centers that provide family-style units that are open 270 days each year. In comparison, Napa County's centers are dorm-style operations that cater to single male residents. Napa County operates three farmworker centers, totaling 180 beds, serving an average of 400 farmworkers during the eleven months of the year that each is open. Housing consists of dorm-style accommodations with two renters per room, and lodgers receive food, hot showers, laundry facilities, a library, and internet access on-site. The center also provides opportunities to participate in community gardens, health screenings, and literacy programs. Farmworkers tend to have lower incomes, higher risk of living in poverty, and limited access to safe, healthy, and affordable housing choices.

In 2001, Napa County was authorized through AB 1550 (Wiggins) Chapter 340, Statutes of 2001 to form a county service area (CSA) to raise funding for the purpose of acquiring, constructing, leasing, or maintaining farmworker housing. The Napa County Board of Supervisors (BOS) adopted an ordinance in 2002 to create CSA No. 4, and, with the approval of the affected property owners, levied a \$10 assessment per acre of planted vineyard. AB 1550 limited the original assessment levied by CSA No. 4 to a five-year period but authorized the BOS to seek an extension of the assessment every five years thereafter. In 2017, SB 240 (Dodd), Chapter 72, increased the assessment to \$15 per acre.

This private assessment, now at \$14 per acre, generates approximately \$650,000 in annual revenue, representing about 30% of the operating costs of the housing centers. The assessment has been reauthorized by the property owners every five years since then. In 2017, AB 317 (Aguiar-Curry), Chapter 469, Statutes of 2017 authorized \$200,000 in state General Fund to support the Napa County farmworker centers. This funding will expire in the fiscal year 2028-29. At the time, the author argued that inflation had increased the farmworker centers' annual operating expenses, and while the County of Napa and its partners have been fiscally responsible in building reserves, increasing costs had eroded this source. The additional funding provided by AB 317 would stave off closure of the centers at the time, which the county was predicting would happen by 2018 when the centers would run out of reserves. HCD operates all other OMS centers. AB 317 essentially directed funds that would go toward state-operated OMS centers in Napa to support the existing farmworker centers upon demonstration that the NCHA is capable of continuing to effectively serve the housing needs of migrant or other farmworkers. The NCHA must provide equal or greater funds from local sources.

This bill would increase the amount that the state provides to the Napa County farm centers from \$250,000 to \$500,000 annually. The author is also requesting an allocation in the budget to fund the centers.

H-2A Visa Program: The H-2A Visa program is a federal program that allows U.S. employers or U.S. agents who meet specific regulatory requirements to bring foreign nationals to the United States to fill temporary agricultural jobs. Petitioners requesting to utilize this program must demonstrate that there are not enough U.S. workers who are able, willing, qualified, and available to do the temporary work. They must also show that employing H-2A workers will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of similarly employed U.S. workers. Employers must provide clean and safe housing to H-2A workers at no charge to the employee. Employees are responsible for their food costs, but employers must provide a place for workers to prepare their meals. An employer must arrange for a worker's transportation from the originating country to the place of employment or reimburse the worker for transportation costs. Since its introduction in 1986, the H-2A program has grown steadily in size. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, in 2000, there were approximately 30,000 visa-holders, in 2010 there were approximately 55,000, and in 2016 there were over 134,000 (including 11,000 in California). This represents about 4-7% of farmworkers nationwide, and 2-3% in California. According to the Economic Policy Institute, this increase is because "most crop workers are unauthorized, and farmers are turning to H-2A guestworkers as unauthorized migration from Mexico to the United States slows, to replace current workers who leave agriculture to find non-farm jobs."

The H-2A program is not uncontroversial. Farmers convey that the additional cost of providing housing and transportation, without the ability to offset those costs through lower wages, limit their use of the program. However, they cite its practical necessity in the face of a diminishing labor supply and the inability of Congress to pass immigration reform that meets the well-documented needs of the nation's food producers. Opponents point to the fact that H-2A visa ties the worker to the employer. They cite power imbalance as enabling substantial abuses, including lack of access to legal resources, wage theft, poor housing, denial of medical benefits for on-the-job injuries, and withholding of documents. As stated above, current federal law requires employers utilizing the H-2A program to provide clean and safe housing to H-2A workers at no charge to the employee. According to the sponsor of this bill, Napa County farmworker centers do not house H-2A workers. Workers are not referred to the centers by their employers but rather

learn about the center through outreach made by the Napa Housing Authority. This bill prohibits centers from providing housing to H-2A workers, and if they do, employers must reimburse the state for the cost of the housing.

According to the Author

"Farmworkers work in the hardest jobs in Napa County's agricultural economy and play a vital role in its success. But many face limited access to affordable housing. NCHAFC are a model for partnerships between employers, government and workers, with subsidies provided by the county and self-assessments on farmers. They provide an important resource by offering low-cost housing and support services for agricultural workers in a region with severe housing shortages. AB 1890 builds on the framework established under AB 317 by extending and increasing the state's authorized matching funds, addressing rising operating costs and supporting the continued operation of these centers. While the centers are located in Napa County, the agricultural workforce they serve contributes to an industry that is critical to the regional and statewide economy. By sustaining stable housing for farmworkers, AB 1890 helps strengthen California's agricultural workforce and support the broader food production system."

Arguments in Support

According to the sponsor, the Napa County Board of Supervisors, "Farmworkers are essential to California's agricultural economy, yet many struggle to find safe and affordable housing. Limited housing options often force workers to commute long distances, live in overcrowded conditions, or leave the region entirely. Ensuring access to stable, affordable housing is critical to supporting the agricultural workforce that sustains local communities and California's broader food production system. AB 1890 increases the authorized state matching funds to help address rising operating costs and ensure the continued operation of these centers. By strengthening an existing and proven partnership between the state and local housing providers, the bill helps maintain stable housing for farmworkers while supporting the agricultural workforce that California relies on."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations:

- 1) Ongoing annual General Fund cost pressures of up to \$250,000 to provide the increase in matching funds to NCHA to assist with the financing, maintenance, and operation of Napa County's farmworker centers.

The author is requesting additional funding in the 2026-27 state budget to cover the increase.

- 2) HCD anticipates minor and absorbable administrative costs resulting from this change.

Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

VOTES

ASM HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: 12-0-0

YES: Haney, Patterson, Ávila Farías, Caloza, Garcia, Kalra, Lee, Quirk-Silva, Ta, Tangipa, Wicks, Wilson

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-1

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta

ABS, ABST OR NV: Tangipa

UPDATED

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