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THIRD READING

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Bill No: AB 845  
Author: Arambula (D)  
Amended: 8/29/25 in Senate  
Vote: 21

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SENATE LABOR, PUB. EMP. & RET. COMMITTEE: 5-0, 6/25/25  
AYES: Smallwood-Cuevas, Strickland, Cortese, Durazo, Laird

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 8/29/25  
AYES: Caballero, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0, 6/3/25 - See last page for vote

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**SUBJECT:** Employment: complaints: agricultural employees

**SOURCE:** La Cooperativa Campesina De California

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**DIGEST:** This bill, upon appropriation, requires the appropriate entities within any department, division, or board within the Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LWDA), upon intake of a complaint by an agricultural employee, as defined, to collaborate with each other and take all reasonable efforts to transmit the complaint to the appropriate entity for processing and investigation.

**ANALYSIS:**

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the LWDA, consisting of various departments and entities, including the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB), the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR), and the Employment Development Department (EDD). (Government Code §§ 15550 et seq.)
- 2) Establishes the ALRB to, among other things, investigate, conduct hearings, and make determinations relating to unfair labor practices impacting agricultural employee. (Labor Code §§ 1141 et seq.)

- 3) Requires the ALRB to maintain a telephone line, as specified, for the purpose of providing interested persons with information concerning their rights and responsibilities, as prescribed, or for referring persons to the appropriate agency or entity with the capacity to render advice or help in dealing with any situation arising out of agricultural labor disputes. (Labor Code § 1142.5)
- 4) Establishes DIR to, among other things, foster, promote, and develop the welfare of the wage earners of California, to improve their working conditions, and to advance their opportunities for profitable employment. (Labor Code §§ 50 et seq.)
- 5) Establishes Division of Labor Standards Enforcement (DLSE), under the direction of the Labor Commissioner (LC), within the DIR, and authorizes the LC to investigate employee complaints and enforce labor laws, as specified. (Labor Code §§ 79 et seq.)
- 6) Establishes California Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Cal/OSHA) within the DIR and requires the Division to enforce all occupational safety and health standards, as specified. (Labor Code §§ 6300 et seq.)

This bill:

- 1) Upon appropriation, requires the appropriate entities within any department, division, or board within the LWDA, upon intake of a complaint by an agricultural employee, as defined, to collaborate with each other and take all reasonable efforts to transmit the complaint to the appropriate entity for processing and investigation.
  - a) Prohibits the transmitting entity, in transmitting a complaint to the appropriate entity, to disclose the identity and personal information of the agricultural employee complainant to the extent prohibited by law without their consent.
- 2) Defines the following terms:
  - a) “Agricultural employee” means a person employed in any of the following:
    - i) An agricultural occupation, as defined in Wage Order No. 14 of the Industrial Welfare Commission.

- ii) An industry preparing agricultural products for the market, on the farm, as defined in Wage Order No. 13 of the Industrial Welfare Commission.
- iii) An industry handling products after harvest, as defined in Wage Order No. 8 of the Industrial Welfare Commission.
- b) “Appropriate entity” includes, but is not limited to, the ALRB, DIR, DLSE, Cal/OSHA, or Employment Development Department (EDD).
- c) “Reasonable efforts” to be consistent with each entity’s confidentiality requirements, including, but not limited to, subdivision (c) of Section 6309.

## Background

*Agricultural Workers.* California is a global leader in agriculture, with over 830,000 workers throughout the course of any given year. Unfortunately, many of these farmworkers face arduous labor, low wages, and deplorable working conditions. As climate change worsens, droughts, wildfires, extreme heat, and flooding only exacerbate the challenges to farmworkers at their workplace. In addition, fear of retaliation or fear of deportation prevents many farmworkers from filing complaints for any workplace violations.

Agricultural employees’ complaints about labor law violations are enforced by three distinct state entities depending on the type of complaint being alleged. Cal/OSHA has jurisdiction over health and safety complaints, the DLSE has jurisdiction over wage and hour complaints, and the ALRB has jurisdiction over complaints related to collective bargaining and unfair labor practices. With a variety of entities covering different labor violations, it can be difficult to know which entity to start with, especially for those unfamiliar with the state’s enforcement system. It can be even more difficult for anyone who has language or cultural barriers.

A February 2025 report from the University of California, Berkeley Possibility Lab found that the majority of low-wage workers, including agricultural workers, are not even aware of the state government entities tasked with enforcing their rights.<sup>1</sup> In fact, in their statewide survey, they found that workers have a relatively low familiarity with state agencies and that nearly two-thirds of workers (65 percent) have heard of Cal/OSHA, but no other department or agency that serves California

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<sup>1</sup> Sadin, Meredith and Amy E. Lerman, “Insights from California’s COVID-19 Workplace Outreach Project and the Trusted Messenger Model.” University of California, Berkeley, Possibility Lab, 2025.

<https://berkeley.app.box.com/s/p48sayqa6i0vs40nsaky0kc0rhruba7i>

workers was as familiar to a majority of workers. Specifically, only 18 percent of respondents indicated they had heard of DIR, and 13 percent had not heard of any labor-related department or agency.

It is possible that farmworkers do not know where to turn to if they need to report a labor violation, and it is also probable that they might end up calling the state entity that may not have jurisdiction (such as calling the ALRB for a Cal/OSHA issue) over resolving the issue. This bill, AB 845, seeks to address this issue by requiring the three state entities, ALRB, DLSE, and Cal/OSHA, to collaborate with each other and take all reasonable efforts to ensure that a complaint by an agricultural employee is transmitted to the appropriate entity for processing and investigation.

*Rural Strategic Engagement Program.* There have been recent efforts to educate workers in rural and semi-rural areas on workplace rights, increase access to state services for workers in those areas, and improve state labor enforcement programs. For instance, funding for ALRB during the 2024 Budget Act established the Rural Strategic Engagement Program (Program) to conduct outreach to rural workers. The funding required ALRB and DIR to implement the three goals of the Program: 1) increasing access to in-person services in farmworker communities, 2) establishing a no-wrong door policy for workers, and 3) simplifying access to information for workers.

While DIR and ALRB have improved their outreach to farmworkers and facilitated their ability to engage with them, there are still gaps in their capacity to improve the distribution of information to farmworkers and address the obstacles farmworkers face when seeking to report or remedy workplace violations.

### **Related/Prior Legislation**

AB 107 (Gabriel, Chapter 22, Statutes of 2024) included appropriations to ALRB and DIR to implement the three goals of the Rural Strategic Engagement Program: 1) increase access to in-person services in farmworker communities, 2) establish a no-wrong door policy for workers, and 3) simplify access to information for workers.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- ALRB anticipates annual costs of \$961,000 (Labor Workforce Development Fund).

- DIR would incur first-year costs of \$2.9 million, and \$2.2 million annually thereafter, to implement the provisions of the bill (Labor Enforcement and Compliance Fund).

**SUPPORT:** (Verified 8/29/25)

La Cooperativa Campesina De California (Source)

**OPPOSITION:** (Verified 8/29/25)

None received

**ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT:** According to the sponsor, La Cooperativa Campesina de California: “The vast majority of California’s agricultural labor force are migrants that speak Spanish and other indigenous languages like Mixteco, Zapoteco, and Triqui, leading to significant difficulties navigating systemic sources of support. Farmworkers’ increasing fears of deportation have further eroded trust in the state resources they are entitled to. Unfortunately, even when farmworkers overcome these barriers to seeking help, state agencies often do not process or refer complaints if the issue falls outside their jurisdiction. As a result, complaints often fall through the cracks and go unaddressed. AB 845 will require better coordination and information sharing amongst the agencies tasked with responding to farmworker complaints.”

**ASSEMBLY FLOOR:** 79-0, 6/3/25

**AYES:** Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

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