



Farmworker Justice Statement on Trump Administration Testimony by OSHA and NIOSH before the House Education and Labor Committee

Today, the leaders of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in the U.S. Department of Labor and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health in the CDC at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services testified before the House Education and Labor Committee Subcommittee on Workforce Protections about their activities regarding worker safety and health during the COVID-19 pandemic. NIOSH Director John Howard, MD, is a career official; NIOSH is primarily a research agency. Loren Sweatt is the "Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health," as there is no Assistant Secretary for OSHA, which adopts and enforces job safety standards.

"The Trump Administration officials utterly failed to explain in any rational sense the refusal by OSHA to issue binding occupational safety standards to protect workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Administration's immoral failure of leadership is most blatantly demonstrated in the refusal to issue mandatory job safety rules to protect workers whom the Administration designated as "essential workers" in a critical economic sector," said Bruce Goldstein, President of Farmworker Justice, a national advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C. that has worked on job safety for farmworkers since its inception in 1981.

Farmworkers have been designated "essential workers" by the Trump Administration and state governments, and the agriculture and food system has been designated as a critical infrastructure sector. There are approximately 2.5 million farmworkers; they continue to be among the lowest-paid workers in the nation and their jobs are ranked among the most dangerous.

"Farmworkers are expected to go to work every day but their working and living conditions often place them in tremendous risk of COVID-19 that can be reduced if

mandatory job safety rules are adopted and enforced," said Goldstein, an attorney who has worked on farmworker issues for over 3 decades.

"Unfortunately, too many employers in the agriculture sector have not been willing or have not been able to implement adequate protections, including social distancing, accurate information in a language workers understand, handwashing facilities, sanitizers, face masks, paid sick leave, access to testing and access to health care."

Farmworker Justice is very concerned that as the harvest seasons ramp up, the high rates of positive COVID-19 tests that have developed in some rural areas, will be widespread. Terrible illness, hardship and death can be averted but this Administration signaled that it has no intention of taking action.

"The immoral failure of leadership by the Trump Administration necessitates action by Congress to adopt specific occupational safety standards and specific requirements on the Department of Labor to enforce them, as well as other public health and economic support initiatives," said Goldstein

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