

Testimony on Resolution 692: Calling upon the New York State Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign A.4762 and S.1921, which would extend labor protections to farm workers

Submitted to
New York City Council Committee on Civil Service and Labor

Submitted by
Jose Calderon
President
Hispanic Federation

June 4, 2015

Committee on Civil Service and Labor:

My name is Jose Calderon and I am the President of the Hispanic Federation (HF). I would like to thank the Committee on Civil Service and Labor for inviting us to submit testimony on behalf of farmworkers in the state of New York.

I would like to start off by stating that Hispanic Federation strongly supports the passage of the Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act (FFLPA) (S.1291/A.4762) and urges the New York State legislature to pass and the governor to sign A.4762 and S.1921. We also thank Council Member I. Daneek Miller for introducing – and all who have co-sponsored – the New York City Council resolution formally calling for the state to pass this law.

As you may know, Hispanic Federation is the premier Latino membership organization in the nation founded to address the many inequities confronting Latinos and the nonprofits that serve them. For 25 years, Hispanic Federation has provided grants, administered human services and coordinated advocacy for our broad network of agencies that serve more than 2 million Latinos in areas of health, education, economic empowerment, immigration and civic engagement.

The Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act, introduced by Senator Adriano Espaillat and Assembly Member Catherine Nolan, would help grant fundamental rights and benefits to farmworkers that have long been available to workers in other vocations.

Farmworkers labor under harsh conditions and engage in intensive physical activity in order to feed all of us. They are seven times more likely than other workers to die from a work-related injury, yet they are exempt from several rights and protections that are afforded to other workers. An estimated 80,000 to 100,000 farm laborers in New York are currently excluded from basic labor protections under state and federal law. FFLPA would ensure that the conditions in which farmworkers work are more safe, sanitary, and humane.

In the past four years, farms in the United States have earned record-high net incomes. In 2014, this number was as high as \$108 billion. New York State in particular has one of the nation's largest and most robust agricultural economies. But even as our farms are prospering, many of our farmworkers are not. Farmworkers in New York are paid little more than minimum wage, and work a range of four to twenty hours in a day.

Farmworkers are also denied the right to organize and bargain, which is guaranteed to employees under the New York State Constitution. They do not have the right to a day of rest, overtime pay, collective bargaining, sanitary working conditions, workers compensation, and more. To deny this already vulnerable population the equal access to protections and benefits contradicts our values and our constitution.

In 2010, New York passed the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights Law and granted fundamental labor rights to the state's domestic workers. It is time for New York to build on its progressive record and act to end this injustice to farmworkers, without delay.

By passing the Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act, New York State would reinforce the need for laws protecting farmworkers and our workforce as a whole. New York can pave the way for other states to pass progressive labor policies that are good for our community and good for our economy.

Thank you.