

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 862

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON URBAN AFFAIRS

Hearing Date: March 31, 2021 10:30 AM - or upon final adjourn./recess or bill referral if permission granted

John Jackson

Self, retired

Southlake, TX

NO

Kathy Tyler

self, retired

Austin, TX

I would like to state support for HB 195 and HB 862, and thank Representative Bernal and Romero for introducing the bills. I had the opportunity to work with migrant and seasonal farmworkers in their homes throughout my career. Since the 1980s I have worked with various nonprofit organizations charged with improving housing situations. Nowhere is housing a more troublesome issue than what farmworkers encounter, both in “homebased” housing and temporary housing while the migrant worker “follows the crops” for ag work. Unfortunately, most of the conditions I observed were substandard, some severely. This has not changed much over the decades.

Despite hard backbreaking work, farmworkers have extremely low incomes. Their work leaves them living below the poverty level. Farmworkers have difficulty affording one safe decent home for their families, but the nature of migrant farm work means they often have to secure temporary housing while in the migrant stream and still continue to pay for their permanent homes back home. The recent National Ag Workers Survey documents shows poverty among farmworkers is a problem. 66% earn incomes below the poverty level, so three out of every five farmworker households suffer from the effects of poverty. Housing is crowded and substandard, 33% of all farmworkers and 45% of migrant farmworkers live in crowded dwellings.

Often the housing situations are dire and appalling. The American Public Health Association said that “poor housing conditions among farmworkers present the nation with a public health threat.” Food safety for all of us is compromised when farmworkers face substandard and dangerous housing conditions. It is a matter of health and safety to farmworkers and to all of us who eat from Texas’ bounty. No year has this been so obvious as it has been during a pandemic, when the nature of food sources is shown to be fragile even as it is all-important.

In fact, the National Center on Farmworker Health’s research shows how important it is during the time of pandemic: “Overcrowded and substandard housing conditions are a major concern for the potential of COVID-19 to spread through agricultural worker communities. A single building may house several dozen workers or more, who often sleep in dormitory-style quarters, making quarantining or social distancing efforts difficult if not impossible. Limited access to restrooms and sinks, at home and in the field, may complicate hygiene prevention efforts.”

Our state’s food and fiber system’s total estimated contribution was \$159.2 billion in 2018. I know of several situations where the lack of housing resulted in lack of workers so growers abandoned their crops or retired early. It hits all of our pocketbooks and it affects all of our health.

Improving this situation is something we can tackle quickly and affordably. HB 195 and HB 862 will help.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this written testimony.

Julie Skotak

self - administrative assistant

Irving, TX

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I am opposed to this bill because it creates new government power to ban the free expression of my Christian beliefs. It takes away my freedoms and elevates those who don't share my beliefs and values to a higher status of freedom.

Cristal Sawyer, Mrs.

CristalClear Tutoring

Conroe, TX

This is NOT OK. I do not support regulation of migrant labor housing increasing a fee, or changing the amount of civil penalty. I also don't support additional migrant labor housing or any enforcing requirements based on gender identity or expression. Girls are girls, boys are boys, and recognition of other genders is NOT based on science or anything else credible. Put your efforts and MY tax dollars somewhere useful like STOPPING illegal immigration and STOPPING the depletion of our public resources due to illegal immigration.