

April 16, 2015

Dear Senator/Representative:

We write to you as organizations representing millions of Americans, including teachers, healthcare professionals, workers, farmworkers, and advocates concerned about children's safety. We are alarmed at reports that children are risking acute nicotine poisoning and other health and safety hazards in US tobacco fields. We urge you to co-sponsor the **Children Don't Belong in Tobacco Fields Act**, which would prohibit children under the age of 18 from employment that brings them into direct contact with tobacco. This legislation would not affect children working on their family's farm.

A study released last year by Human Rights Watch found that child tobacco workers on US farms are exposed to nicotine, toxic pesticides, extreme heat, and other dangers. Nearly three-quarters of the child tobacco workers they interviewed had experienced symptoms including nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, headaches, dizziness, difficulty breathing, skin rashes, and irritation to their eyes and mouths. Many of these symptoms are consistent with acute nicotine poisoning, also known as Green Tobacco Sickness.

According to a new bulletin published by OSHA and NIOSH, children and adolescents who handle tobacco may be more sensitive to chemical exposures, more likely to suffer from green tobacco sickness, and may suffer more serious health effects than adults. Public health experts have found that nicotine exposure in adolescence can cause mood disorders and lasting deficits in cognition. In addition, several pesticides commonly used during tobacco farming are known neurotoxins, which can cause cancer, depression, neurologic deficits, and reproductive health problems.

Children don't belong in tobacco fields. Children can't legally purchase cigarettes until they are 18, yet current US law allows children as young as 12 to work unlimited hours outside of school on a farm of any size, and has no minimum age for children to work on small farms. In addition, the US has no regulations to protect child farmworkers from nicotine exposure.

In recent months, major US tobacco companies, including Reynolds American and Altria Group, have recognized the risks to children and adopted new policies to bar the employment of children under the age of 16 in tobacco cultivation. But these voluntary policies are not enough.

Please help protect children's health by joining Senator Durbin and Congressman Cicilline in co-sponsoring the Children Don't Belong in Tobacco Fields Act.

Sincerely,

A World at School
Advocates for Children and Youth
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
American Federation of Teachers

Arkansas Human Development Corporation
Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs
California Human Development
Center for Employment Training
Child Labor Coalition
Children's Health Fund
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles
Earthjustice
Farmworker Association of Florida
Farmworker Justice
First Focus Campaign for Children
Food Chain Workers Alliance
Free the Slaves
Global Campaign for Education - US
HELP New Mexico, Inc.
Human Rights Watch
Illinois Migrant Council
Immigrant Worker Project (Ohio)
International Initiative to End Child Labor
International Labor Rights Forum
Kentucky Equal Justice Center
Labor Coalition for Latin American Advancement
MAFO, Inc. a National Partnership of Farmworker and Rural Organizations
Media Voices for Children
Migrant Clinicians Network
Migrant Legal Action Program
Mississippi Delta Council for Farmworkers Opportunities, Inc.
NC Field
NAACP
National Center for Farmworker Health
National Consumers League
National Council for Latin American Advancement
National Council for Occupational Safety and Health
National Council of La Raza
National Education Association
National Employment Law Project
National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association
NC Justice Center
Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) of Washington State
Oregon Human Development Corporation
ORO Development Corporation (Oklahoma)
Oxfam America
PathStone Corporation
Polaris Project

Public Citizen
Ramsay Merriam Fund
Rukmini Foundation
Student Action with Farmworkers
Telamon Corporation (Virginia)
Texans Care for Children
United Mine Workers of America
West Virginia University Injury Control Research Center
Worker Justice Center of New York
Worksafe (California)