



PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF MIGRANT FARMWORKERS

Summary

Throughout New York State, thousands of farmworkers face difficult working conditions, living conditions and other barriers to quality of life.

Conference Position

The Catholic Conference and the Council of Catholic Charities Directors advocate for enactment of measures that will enhance the quality of life for migrant workers and supports the Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act and strongly urge enactment of this legislation.

Rationale

The above-referenced legislation would address a number of exemptions in New York's labor, public health and workers compensation laws that currently prevent farmworkers from accessing rights and privileges available to other workers in New York State.

Farmworkers are excluded from many laws that establish worker protections, including overtime pay, employer contributions to the unemployment and workers' compensation funds, and public health protections including sanitation and housing standards. In addition to ending these exclusions, this bill would require that farmworkers be given a 24-hour day of rest in every calendar week which, whenever possible, would coincide with the laborers traditional day for religious worship.

In December 1999, legislation was enacted eliminating farmworkers' exemption from the minimum wage laws. Enactment of this bill would continue the process of economic justice for agricultural workers. It would also grant collective bargaining rights to farm laborers.

There is no legitimate reason for treating farmworkers inequitably. They should be afforded the same rights, protections and benefits that other workers in New York State receive. It is unacceptable for farmworkers to be denied the basic labor, safety and health protections other workers enjoy. Farmworkers make a significant contribution to the production of agricultural products in this state, and are deserving of being treated with dignity.

By recognizing the rights of farmworkers and the unique contributions of agriculture, New York can develop policies which bring economic fairness, safety, and dignity to the production of agricultural goods from which we all benefit.