



July 22, 2020

Senator Jerry Hill
Chair, Senate Labor, Public Employment and Retirement Committee
California State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Assembly Bill 685 (Reyes)--SUPPORT

Dear Chairman Hill,

The Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) has represented small and mid-scale family farmers in California for over 40 years, seeking to preserve family-scale agriculture and promote environmental sustainability. We write today in strong support of AB 685 by Assemblymember Reyes, which will clarify employer reporting requirements following worker exposure to COVID-19.

Many of our members hire workers on their farms, and most of them hire these workers directly. They have been very concerned about COVID-19 impacting their workers and by extension their own families. They are anxious to have good information about what is occurring in the communities around them.

There have been repeated reports of significant outbreaks among workers on large farms or in food processing plants, and yet it has been difficult to get information about numbers of workers, whether they have been quarantined, and what has really happened. Workers themselves have reported being kept in the dark and ordered to continue working or be fired. Current law only requires employers to report to Cal/OSHA fatalities and “serious” incidents, and many COVID-19 exposures will not immediately result in either, leaving most workers and almost all of the public completely in the dark regarding where outbreaks have begun. Employers are mandated to provide safe and healthy workplaces, but without a requirement to report COVID-19 exposure, no workplace is safe and we are all at unnecessary risk.

CAFF has been involved in a survey of COVID-19 and farm workers and we have been trying to get basic data on COVID-19 incidence from the different counties. With the exception of Monterey County, we have found it almost impossible to know whether cases are occurring in agriculture.

AB 685 (Reyes) will clarify that employers must notify affected workers, their union(s) where these exist, Cal/OSHA, CDPH, and the relevant local health agencies when

CAFF Support for AB 685

July 22, 2020

Page 2 of 2

workers have been “exposed to COVID-19”. This phrase is defined as any worker dying from COVID-19 or receiving, from a licensed health provider, a positive test, diagnosis, or order to quarantine.

This bill simply requires effective notification to the identified entities so that those entities can make informed choices on how to help us all survive the pandemic. It is the least that we can do for those risking their lives to keep us fed, cared for, and otherwise safe during these incredibly difficult times.

For these reasons CAFF strongly supports AB 685.

Sincerely,



David Runsten
Policy Director

cc: Members, Senate Labor, Employment, and Retirement Committee
Assemblymember Eloise Reyes