



April 13, 2012

The Honorable John Kline, Chairman  
House Committee on Education and the Workforce  
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Washington, D.C. 20515

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Dear Chairman Kline:

**The Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs** is the national federation of public and private non-profit agencies that provide job training, placement, and other services to our nation's eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers and, thereby, assisting farmers and ranchers across America. The program has been one of the Department of Labor's federal job training programs since the early 1970s. Under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) it is authorized at Title I, Section 167.

If H.R. 4297 were enacted, it would have a devastating impact on vulnerable populations and on the agricultural sector's employment training needs. Migrant and seasonal farmworkers are an exceptionally hard-to-serve population with unique barriers that the traditional universal access model would not be able to effectively serve. In fact, it is unlikely that more than a handful of agricultural workers would be served each year, compared to the thousands who reach good careers through the current national program.

Migrant and seasonal farmworkers are a highly mobile population, often moving from state to state during the spring, summer, and fall, calling into question which state has the financial responsibility to serve them. One of the reasons it has always been a national program throughout the various iterations of federal workforce development programs is due to the realization that governors should not be put in the position of arguing over which state should serve mobile farmworkers or of using federal workforce dollars, which are only sufficient to serve less than one in twenty eligible job seekers, to serve individuals who are not residents of their state. In that argument, the farmworker would almost always be the loser.

More importantly, our member agencies have achieved an unparalleled level of success with a part of the workforce that has significant obstacles to obtaining jobs with self and family-sustaining wages. English is often their second language; the average education level is just 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade; they typically lack access to affordable transportation; and they experience an array of health and personal problems stemming from the extreme poverty they endure. Yet, they persevere, usually obtaining good, family sustaining jobs after receiving the tailored training and placement services our members provide.

We are proud to note that since the establishment of the Common Measures, this program has performed at a very high level. In most quarters, the program operates at the highest level of all of DOL's programs that utilize the Common Measures. For example, the most recent report from DOL that

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Farmworker Training, Employment  
and Service Organizations**  
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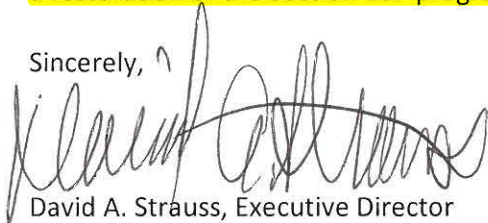
compares programs shows the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) produced an entered employment rate of 83% and an employment retention rate of 80%. Those are excellent results, especially when we consider that most of the rural areas in which this program operates are still experiencing a debilitating economic recession, with unemployment rates in excess of the national average.

**It is for these reasons that we must oppose the elimination of Section 167 of the WIA contained in H.R. 4297.**

There is really no way migrant and seasonal farmworkers can be adequately served under a totally state run system of job training, especially one which carries no funding mandate for service to this population. It is well established that the overwhelming majority of One Stop Career Centers relies on mandatory partners, such as the agencies that work with farmworkers, to serve vulnerable populations. While our member agencies are usually co-located in One Stop Centers, it is clear from over 12 years of practice that absent our agencies' presence, this population, with its special needs for flexible work hours and training sites, and culturally and linguistically prepared staff, could not be served. Farmworkers need the active outreach that our members provide, reaching them in remote locations before or after normal work hours and even on weekends.

All of these reasons make it imperative that farmworkers continue to be served by a national program. Therefore we urge you to consider these facts as you re-examine the various parts of H.R. 4297. **Without a restoration of the Section 167 program as a separate national program, we must oppose H.R. 4297.**

Sincerely,



David A. Strauss, Executive Director



Ernie Flores, President

Cc: Committee members