

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 10, 2021

Governor Greg Abbott
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Governor Abbott,

We write to you with urgent concern regarding the vaccination of farmworkers, meatpackers, and other agricultural workers in the state of Texas. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) clearly recommends that agricultural and food workers be prioritized for vaccine eligibility alongside those over 75¹, yet Texas has afforded no such priority to farmworkers, meatpackers, and other agricultural workers who have been among the most essential and vulnerable of workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. We ask that you follow the lead of many other states, and ensure agricultural workers are a prioritized category for vaccination, beginning as soon as possible.

Texas agriculture is a 24-billion-dollar industry² which helps feed the nation and supports entire communities across our state. The foundation of this industry is the agricultural workers doing the hard yet necessary work of tilling and planting the fields, picking the crops, raising and herding livestock, and working dangerous packing lines. Throughout the pandemic, these agricultural workers have been unable to stay home. One cannot pick melons, plant corn, or herd cattle via zoom. As another agricultural work season begins, it is imperative for Texas' agricultural industry and our nation's food supply chain that these agricultural workers be vaccinated against COVID-19, which has taken a frightful toll on agricultural workers across the nation.³

We also note that agricultural workers in Texas and throughout the nation are a largely low-income and majority Latino workforce⁴. In Texas, some of the largest populations of agricultural workers live in South Texas, where the COVID-19 pandemic has caused immense suffering⁵ and where farmworkers have faced unique hardships as a result.⁶ Prioritizing agricultural workers for vaccine eligibility is therefore not only critical for the stability of our food supply chain, but also a way to improve equity in our state's vaccine distribution and reach long-underserved rural communities along the U.S.-Mexico border.

While we disagree strongly with your recent decision to lift public health restrictions and mask mandates, that is all the more reason to ensure that agricultural workers are protected as they continue to do their essential work. It is the least we owe the workers who put food on America's table.

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm695152e2.htm?s_cid=mm695152e2_w

² <https://www.texasagriculture.gov/About/TexasAgStats.aspx>

³ <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/09/08/farmworkers-coronavirus-disaster-409339>

⁴ https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/naws/pdfs/NAWS_Research_Report_13.pdf

⁵ <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/10/mass-death-in-south-texas/616907/>

⁶ <https://www.expressnews.com/news/us-world/border-mexico/article/Texas-farmworkers-struggle-without-government-aid-15224044.php>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JOAQUIN CASTRO". The letters are stylized and connected.

Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Filemon Vela". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Filemon Vela,
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Veronica Escobar". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vicente Gonzalez". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sylvia Garcia". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Sylvia Garcia
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Al Green". The signature is enclosed in a green oval shape.

Al Green
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Veasey". The signature is long and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Marc Veasey
Member of Congress