



AB 1783 – Farmworker Housing

SUMMARY

California suffers from a severe shortage of quality and affordable housing for farmworker families.

AB 1783 creates a streamlined process in which farm owners and operators can dedicate agricultural land to quality employee housing, and it phases out state financial support of the federal H-2A program to focus state resources on family friendly housing.

PROBLEM

The state's housing shortage isn't just an urban problem; it affects rural areas too, particularly those regions that depend on agriculture. Many farms have surplus land that could be used to build safe and secure housing for farmworkers, but in order to do that the land first needs to be rezoned. Unfortunately, this rezoning is often blocked by communities that don't want housing for farmworkers.

This leads to farmworker housing stopgaps that are often substandard and unsafe. Without adequate housing, farmworkers and their families are left with no choice but to sleep in their vehicles, in illegally converted garages, and sometimes even outdoors—living conditions all can agree are not suitable under any circumstances.

The 2018 Farmworker Study & Action Plan for the Salinas and Pajaro Valleys confirmed that agricultural workers are living in severely overcrowded conditions. The study also demonstrates that a preponderance of workers are year-round residents. Of those surveyed, 75% are married, often living in households with minor children. Although much focus has been on providing housing for temporary farmworkers, the data is clear that the most significant need is for permanent farmworker family housing.

This is evident too in the high number of homeless students in farmworker communities. In twelve schools in rural Monterey County, more than one out of every five students are homeless.

In one school, Sherwood Elementary, that number is nearly 40%.

California's failure to provide decent and affordable housing hurts our ability to attract workers to our farms. At the same time, the federal H-2A push steers resources towards a temporary worker visa program that by definition does not allow for family housing.

Under the visa program, a farmworker is disconnected from family and dependent on a single employer that controls daily meals, housing, and immigration status.

LEGISLATION

The Farm Worker Housing Act of 2019 creates a streamlined process where agricultural employee housing located on land zoned for agricultural uses shall be subject solely to a ministerial approval process and not subject to a conditional use permit, provided it adheres to key environmental safeguards and meets objective quality standards, which include:

- No barrack-style housing, gender discrimination (all male dorms) or other housing that does not allow family unity.
- No dual-role of employer and landlord. An employer of farm workers cannot also serve as a landlord.
- No for-profit management. Housing must be managed by a qualified affordable housing organization.

Beyond the new housing pathway, AB 1783 phases out state funding and support, in the form of grants or loans, for use in the federal H-2A program.

SUPPORT

United Farm Workers (Sponsor)



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Alisal Union School District
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, Inc.
California Coalition for Rural Housing
California Institute for Rural Studies
California Renters Legal Advocacy and Educational
Fund
California Yimby
Center for Sustainable Neighborhoods
Center for Farmworker Families
City of Hollister
City of Morgan Hill
City of Salinas
City of San Juan Bautista
City of Soledad
Community Housing Improvement Systems and
Planning Association, Inc.
Council of San Benito County Governments
County of Santa Cruz
Cultiva La Salud
Food Empowerment Project
IF
Kathleen A. Rose, Superintendent/President of
Gavilan Joint Community College District
La Cooperativa Campesina de California
Mutual Housing California
Pueblo Unido (CDC) Community Development
Corporation
San Benito County
San Benito High School District
Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority
Santa Cruz County Community Coalition to
Overcome Racism
Santa Cruz Indivisible
Supervisor Cindy Chavez, District 2, County of Santa
Clara
Supervisor Jim Gillio, Fourth District, County of San
Benito

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