



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Adriano Espallat

Senator Adriano Espallat, Farmworkers' Advocates Call for Passage of Farmworkers Bill of Rights and End to Brutal Working Conditions for New York's Farmworkers

ADRIANO ESPAILLAT March 5, 2012

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Currently lacking basic labor protections, farmworkers would receive weekly day off, workers' compensation, sanitary working conditions, and other important rights

(New York, NY) – Senator Adriano Espallat and advocates for New York's farmworkers called for the passage of the Farmworkers Bill of Rights, a critical piece of legislation which will help end brutal working conditions for farmworkers across the state.

The legislation (S. 1862/Espaillet) will bring protections for farmworkers on par with many other laborers across the state. The Farmworkers Bill of Rights establishes a weekly day off, workers compensation, sanitary working conditions, unemployment insurance, and the right to collectively bargain for farmworkers who have been systemically denied basic labor protections and who toil in unacceptable conditions.

“Farmworkers are directly responsible for feeding all of us. The least we can do is make sure they are treated in a humane way,” said Senator Adriano Espaillet (D – Manhattan/Bronx). “I am proud to sponsor this legislation because it will provide critical protections to farmworkers, helping safeguard their well-being without harming production at New York’s farms.”

The legislation closes dangerous loopholes in the law which leave farmworkers vulnerable to abuse. The legislation enacts the following measures to help establish basic protections for farmworkers:

Weekly day off

- Workers compensation
- Overtime pay, when eligible
- Requirement that all farm and food processing labor camps follow sanitary codes
- Collective bargaining (permissible, but not mandated)
- Mandatory reporting of injuries sustained at work
- Unemployment insurance

“The protections we are calling for are basic, common-sense, and rights that all workers in New York should have,” said Senator Espaillat. “By taking care of those who feed us and help propel one of the most important economic engines of our state, we will sustain New York’s great agriculture industry while living up to our moral responsibility.”

Mario Cilento, president of the NYS AFL-CIO said, "It is past time for our state to enact legislation to help farmworkers gain the same voice and the same dignity that virtually all other workers in New York have earned and are entitled to. The 2.5 million members of NYS AFL-CIO will stand with every worker who has the courage and conviction to stand up for themselves. We encourage all of New York’s elected officials to look closely at what our farm workers endure and to stand with us in addressing their struggle."

Assemblyman David Gantt said: “As a former farmworker who has seen, first-hand, the brutal conditions at farms, I urge my colleagues to join us in passing the farmworkers bill of rights and giving these laborers the basic protections they lack. As New Yorkers, we have a moral duty to look out for these vulnerable workers and allow them the same fundamental rights as all other employees in our great state.”

Reverend Richard Witt, a long-time advocate for farmworkers’ rights expressed strong support for the legislation. “It is critical that that we finally pass this legislation and give farm workers basic protections so they can continue to work in safe and fair conditions.”

Senator Gustavo Rivera said: “The issue of ensuring that farmworkers are provided basic workers rights should be a priority for every New Yorker," said Senator Rivera. "Farmworkers perform an essential service as part of our state's agricultural industry, during which time they work long hours in difficult working conditions. We must work together to ensure that these individuals have basic rights such as a day of rest, overtime pay, disability insurance, unemployment benefits and the right to collective bargaining."

“Farmworkers help put food on New Yorkers’ tables. They deserve the same labor protections – the right to work in sanitary conditions, the right to organize, and the right to

work decent hours while being fairly compensated" said Assemblyman Guillermo Linares (D – Manhattan). "I urge my colleagues to join us in voting for this important legislation to give farmworkers the protections they deserve."

Photo caption: *Senator Espaillat, flanked by Assembly Member Guillermo Linares (second from left) and David Gantt (extreme right) and advocates for farmworkers' rights, calls for passage of Farmworkers Bill of Rights.*