

Date of Hearing: April 21, 2021

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Lisa Calderon, Chair

AB 941 (Bennett) – As Amended April 14, 2021

SUBJECT: Farmworker assistance: resource centers

SUMMARY: Requires the Department of Community Services and Development (CSD) to establish a grant program for counties to establish farmworker resource centers that provide farmworkers and their families with services related to, among other things, education, housing, payroll and wage rights, and health and human services. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Makes Legislative findings and declarations about the agricultural industry and the importance of farmworkers in the Californian economy.
- 2) Defines “Center” as a farmworker resource center that provides services to those in the agricultural industry and their families, as specified.
- 3) Defines “Department” as CSD.
- 4) Defines “Program” as the grant program established and administered to provide funds to counties for farmworker resource centers.
- 5) Requires CSD, upon appropriation of the Legislature, to establish and administer a grant program for eligible counties to create and fund farmworker resource centers that provide information and services, as specified, to farmworkers and their families.
- 6) Provides that the farmworker resource centers established through the program offer services that include, but are not limited to, assistance with public agencies and answering questions on programs related to education, housing, utilities, payroll and wage rights, and health and human services.
- 7) Provides that a farmworker resource center may offer services at a brick and mortar location in the county or through a mobile center to conduct outreach directly to farmworker communities.
- 8) Requires counties to work with local or statewide community-based organizations to develop the farmworker resource center, to provide 25% of the center’s program funding, and provide services in at least English and Spanish; further, encourages centers to provide services in additional languages as requested by the relevant community-based organizations.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the CSD within the California Health and Human Services Agency (CHHS) to provide service and activities that have an impact on causes of poverty to communities and low-income participants, including homeless individuals and families, migrants, and the elderly poor, as specified. (Government Code Section [GOV] 12085 (b))
- 2) Establishes provisions for implementing the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Program within the State of California, as specified. States Legislative intent to govern the

CSBG Program under specific principles and planning to promote new economic opportunities for those living in poverty. (GOV 12726)

- 3) Provides that CSBG funding may be used to assist programs that, among other things, meet the needs of migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families, such as daycare for children and elderly persons, education, health services, improved housing and sanitation, legal advice and representation, and consumer training and counseling, and assistance in processing applications for legalization and citizenship. (GOV 12767)
- 4) Requires CSD to administer CSBG Program funds to provide financial assistance for activities designed to have a measurable impact on causes of poverty in a community or areas of the community where poverty is a particularly acute problem. (GOV 12745)
- 5) States Legislative intent that funds be allocated to the State pursuant to the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program to eligible cities and counties, as specified, to benefit the housing and economic development needs of families or individuals with low to moderate-income. (Health & Safety Code Section [HSC] 50825)
- 6) Defines “agricultural employee” as one engaged in agriculture; further, provides that “agriculture” includes all branches of farming. (Labor Code Section [LAB] 1140.4)
- 7) Defines an “individual with employment barriers” as an individual with any characteristic that substantially limits their ability to obtain employment and includes members of certain groups, including, but not limited to: displaced homemakers, low-income individuals, ex-offenders, youth who are in, or have aged out of, the foster care system, and eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers. (Unemployment Insurance Code Section 14005 (j))

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Department of Community Services and Development: The Office of Economic Opportunity was established in 1964 and began the streamlining of federal dollars to community organizations that assist low-income families. The California Legislature renamed the department in 1996 to CSD to describe the agency’s purpose more accurately as it expanded to supporting populations through new programs. Housed within the CHHS, CSD partners with private nonprofits and local governments to administer programs that help low-income families and provide education and training access. Through the grant programs they administer, CSD helps individuals achieve economic security and reduce utility costs in various ways. CSD is currently responsible for oversight of several federal and statewide grants.

Farmworker Resource Programs: The Farmworker Resource Grant Program structure is based on the successful model of the services provided through a local program in Ventura County. The county provided approval for the Farmworker Resource Program, housed within the local Human Services Agency, in 2017. Ventura County partnered with community-based organizations to determine administration procedures and services offered by the program and continues to partner with these organizations to provide appropriate supports. Since its creation, the Resource Program has engaged with the agricultural workforce to build trust and communicate with the industry workers to meet their needs, directly serving over 1,400 farmworkers throughout the county. The program assists in facilitating resolutions in workplace

disputes and connects farmworkers with the appropriate agencies for various issues, including local county welfare departments, to gain access to public benefits and resources.

Coronavirus Pandemic: In March of 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom declared a statewide state of emergency in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. With over 500,000 deaths resulting from coronavirus across our country, the impact of this virus has touched almost every aspect of everyday life. We have watched as the effects of COVID-19 have caused strain on California's public programs, healthcare system, and the financial security of many. The agricultural industry, deemed essential by the state, has attempted to keep its workers safe during this unprecedented time as recommendations and regulations change. Unfortunately, due to many factors, including environment and job benefits, the pandemic has highlighted existing workplace health and safety struggles for farmworkers. These frontline workers have kept one of our largest industries flowing during a time of crisis despite the increased obstacles the coronavirus has created.

Need for this bill: This bill would establish a grant program to fund the creation of farmworker resource centers and encourage counties to invest in this workforce and their families. Agricultural workers are a fundamental piece of the California economy, but they often face some of the most severe workplace issues, many of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Creating a grant program that would allow local governments to receive financial support in establishing a farmworker resource center could provide this vulnerable workforce better access to workplace dispute resolutions and public resources for which they may be eligible.

According to the author, "Farmworkers are an essential and critical part of our state. There would not be an agricultural industry without the hard-working men and women out in the fields. However, it is not enough to praise our farmworkers; we must also support them. The Mexican Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP) and the Central Coast Alliance for A Sustainable Economy (CAUSE) are two organizations in my district that have been working hard to support local farmworkers. They joined with a group of progressive growers and the County of Ventura to create the Farmworker Resource Program. This resource center has already assisted 1,400 farmworkers. It can serve as a model for other counties interested in helping farmworkers feel valued, protected, and supported as they navigate the challenges they face. This bill creates a grant program to encourage counties to create similar programs in their communities to support farmworkers."

RELATED AND PRIOR LEGISLATION:

AB 1783 (Rivas), Chapter 866, Statutes of 2019, revises the entitlement process and eligibility for state programs that provide funding for farmworker housing.

AB 386 (Garcia) of 2019, would have established the Agricultural Working Poor Energy Efficient Housing Program within CSD. AB 386 was vetoed by the Governor.

AB 344 (Calderon) of 2019, would have established the New Beginnings California Program within CSD to provide funds to implement continuum of care programs for individuals experiencing homelessness. AB 344 was vetoed by the Governor.

AB 317 (Aguiar-Curry), Chapter 469, Statutes of 2017, requires the Department of Housing and Community Development to administer a new fund to operate and maintain the Napa County Housing Authority, as specified.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Immigrant Policy Center
County of Ventura

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Emmalynn Mathis / HUM. S. / (916) 319-2089