



Child Labor Coalition

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CARE ACT WOULD PROTECT 500,000 CHILD FARMWORKERS

Child Labor Advocates Call for Long Overdue Updates to Laws Meant to Protect Youngest Workers

Washington, DC – On Capitol Hill today, the Child Labor Coalition (CLC) called for members of Congress to improve the harsh conditions facing child laborers in American agriculture by pledging their support to new legislation. Under the Children’s Act for Responsible Employment of 2007 (CARE Act), a new bill introduced today by Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-Calif.), protections for young farmworkers would be substantially increased for the first time since the enactment of the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938.

"I commend the Child Labor Coalition for organizing this important advocacy effort on Capitol Hill on behalf of children who work in our nation's agricultural fields," Rep. Roybal-Allard said. "I have introduced the CARE Act today to curb unfair child labor practices in agriculture that allow young children to work in dangerous conditions, and I am grateful for the Coalition's efforts to help pass this needed and long overdue legislation."

Despite agriculture’s ranking as one of the three most dangerous industries in the United States, the law permits children to begin working on a farm at a younger age and for longer hours than other working youth. The CARE Act raises protections for child farmworkers to the same level as children working in other industries, increases the maximum civil and criminal penalties for child labor violations, and strengthens pesticide safety provisions in agriculture to account for the higher risks pesticides pose to children and women. The bill preserves the family farm exemption, enabling children of any age to continue to work on their parents’ farms.

“The National Consumers League has a long history of advocating for the rights of workers—urban and rural, old and young,” said Linda Golodner, NCL President and Co-Chair of the NCL-coordinated CLC. “These child laborers are some of our nation’s most vulnerable, and it’s about time our government made real steps to improve their working conditions and their lives as a whole.”

The briefing also featured Norma Flores, a former child farmworker, and Armand Pereira, Director of the Washington branch of the International Labor Organization. In addition, two CLC members introduced new educational materials on child labor in agriculture: *In Our Own Backyard: The Hidden Problem of Child Farmworkers in America* (www.ourownbackyard.org), an online curriculum from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and *Children in the Fields: An American Problem* (<http://www.afop.org/news.htm>), a report from the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs.

"The notion that oppressive child labor occurs legally within the United States shocks us as educators and will likely shock students as well," said Antonia Cortese, AFT Executive Vice President and Co-Chair of the CLC. "This topic is important for us to address in the classroom and can serve as an effective tool for teaching students about the human impact of public policy and how they can change it."

The Child Labor Coalition is a group of more than 40 organizations that strive to protect working youth and to promote legislation, programs, and initiatives to end child labor exploitation in the United States and abroad.

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