



## Meeting Minutes: Governor's Committee on the Safety, Health, and Wellbeing of Agricultural and Food Processing Workers

DATE: 12/12/2022

MINUTES PREPARED BY: CINTHIA MARTINEZ

Attendance

### Committee Members

#### Present

**Erik Zabel**, Epidemiologist Principal, Minnesota Department of Health

**Elise Sporre**, Project Manager and Outreach Coordinator, Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services

**Lorrie Janatopoulos**, CareerForce Director, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

**Patrice Bailey**, Assistant Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

**Rodolfo Gutierrez**, Executive Director, HACER

**Sarah Berry**, Public Health Director, Waseca County | CHS Administrator, Le Sueur – Waseca Community Health Board

**Tamara Nelsen**, Executive Director, Minnesota AgriGrowth Council

#### Absent

**Kiza Olson**, CHS Administrator, Meeker-McLeod-Sibley Community Health Services

**Dan Glessing**, President, Minnesota Farm Bureau

**Emilia Gonzalez Avalos**, Executive Director, Unidos MN

**Gary Wertish**, President, Minnesota Farmers Union

**Jim Gleb**, President, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1189

**Nicole Blissenbach**, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry

**Rena Wong**, Director of Organizing, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 663

**Stephanie Low**, Interim Executive Director/ Chief Medical Officer, Community Health Service Inc.

**Guests:** Griselt Andrade, Lead Attorney, Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services; John Stiffin, Department of Labor & Industry; Nima Hussein, Community Services and Government Relations Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development; Noemi Trevino, Migrant Education, Minnesota Department of Education

**Staff Present:** Cinthia Martinez, CareerForce Office Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development; Prairie Bly, SPA Director/Labor Standards Supervisor, Department of Labor & Industry; Valerie Gamble, State Program Admin Principal, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

### Agenda

12:30 PM Welcome / Introductions

12:35 PM Approve Minutes & Agenda

12:40 PM Employer Listening Forum Update

12:50 PM Housing Committee Update  
1:10 PM Status Update on AWWC Recommendations  
1:20 PM Public comments  
1:30 PM Adjourn

## Meeting notes

### Welcome/ Introductions

### Approve Minutes & Agenda

Approved.

### AWWC Employer Listening Forum Update

Discussions focused on initiatives from this group, such as the ombudsperson, codification of the committee, and housing and transportation, which are two of the most important issues for employers. There was also mention of the difficulty of designing solutions because every employer has different housing needs, some seasonal, some year-round. In response to a question about their ability to share information from the state, Jason Culotta from Midwest mentioned the Wisconsin Family Health Clinic. The group provides medical services to migrant seasonal workers and has a good working relationship with employers. Public health groups were also mentioned as a valuable resource for communication. Additionally, employer representatives expressed their hope that the Ombudsperson will act as a hub for resources, and the importance of ongoing communication. Due to a shortage of workers, robots were also discussed as trends for the future of the industry.

Committee member Erik Zabel asked about the possibility of employers being able help provide data from their workers.

### Housing Subcommittee Update

On Monday December 5 the housing work group hosted a meeting with representatives from different state agencies regarding housing jurisdiction. The conversation was going through different scenarios that Committee member Elise, her team, and other outreach staff identified related to ag worker housing. Next steps are to draft an information flyer for direct service providers when interacting with ag workers who want to submit a housing related complaint. We are also continuing to work in comparing standards specifically with MN lodging code to see if there is any overlap with MN OSHA inspections, or if they can share some resources. Notes from that were shared in Friday's email.

The housing workgroup also has a MN housing staff meeting set up to discuss our housing legislative recommendations from last year, and looking at a meeting with DHS to see if there are resources there.

### Status update on AWWC Recommendations

Two of the recommendations we had last year were the office of ombudsperson and codifying the Committee in statute. We think it's best to table the office of ombudsperson for this legislative session. Some of the reasons for tabling are that we are making progress in looking at the agency-level recommendations around housing jurisdiction, which could inform the office of ombudsperson should we decide to move forward with it. Also, employers at the forum weren't sure how an ombudsperson's office would be helpful. We hope to clarify the background information without creating an office until we are clearer about what it should look like. We would like to move forward with codifying the committee in statute. This will give it a more permanent position moving forward to make sure some of the gaps no longer exist. It will also allow different and more varied representation for the committee and for the introduction of ongoing or emerging issues. This legislation would fund a director for the committee and a support administrative support staff person.

Nima Hussein is working with DEED governmental affairs in this process. Right now, Nima and Darielle are working on correcting the bill language and making sure it is sent straight to the governor's office. Next, when we get the committee of legislative assigned, and each representative and senator is assigned, we will prepare to connect with them in January. The creation of more testimonies will also have a significant impact in moving forward.

From DLI's perspective, Prairie stated that they are hoping to hear back from the Governor's office regarding the proposals that were submitted. In addition to submitting similar proposals as last year, we hope to have more success this year, especially in strengthening some migrant worker protections.

## Public Comments

None

## Adjourn