



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

DATE: 2/07/2022

MINUTES PREPARED BY: CINTHIA MARTINEZ

Attendance

Committee Members

Present

Colin Laffey, Staff Attorney, Agricultural Worker Project, Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS)

Dan Glessing, President, Minnesota Farm Bureau

Emilia Gonzalez Avalos, Executive Director, Unidos MN

Erik Zabel, Epidemiologist Principal, Minnesota Department of Health

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

Rodolfo Gutierrez, Executive Director, HACER

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

Absent

Andrea Vaubel, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Gary Wertish, President, Minnesota Farmers Union

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

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

Tamara Nelsen, Executive Director, Minnesota AgriGrowth Council

Staff Present: Cinthia Martinez, CareerForce Office Coordinator, Minnesota Department of

Employment and Economic Development; Jessica Grosz, Director of Labor Standards and Apprenticeship, Minnesota Department of Labor, and Industry; Lorrie Janatopoulos, CareerForce Director, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development; Matt Lucas, Supervisor MNOSHA Workplace Safety Consultation, Department of Labor and Industry; Maureen Ramirez, Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development; Valerie Gamble, State Program Admin Principal, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Agenda:

1:00 PM **Welcome**

1:03 PM **Introductions**

1:08 PM **Approve Minutes**

1:10 PM **Updates**

1:25 PM **Review Governor's Budget Recommendations**

1:30 PM **Next Steps in the Legislation Process- What to Expect**

1:35 PM **Food and Farm Workers Relief Grant Application**

1:55 PM **Next Steps**

1:57 PM **Public Comments**

1:58 PM **Final Thoughts**

2:00 PM **Adjourn**

Meeting notes

Guest Introductions:

No members of the public introduced themselves.

Guests Present:

Michelle Manivel, Public Engagement Liaison, Office of Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan

Noemi Trevino, Migrant Education Program Specialist, Minnesota Department of Education

Paul Hugunin, Division Director, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Ashley Bress, Grants Supervisor, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Courtney VanderMey, State Program Administrator, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Madelyn Nelson, Director of Boards & Commissions, Office of Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan

Griselt Andrade, Lead attorney Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS)

Approve Minutes & Agenda

Approved.

Updates

As all of you are aware, some legislative initiatives as well as some internal agency initiatives were included in the recommendations report. We are happy to share that four out of five of the recommendations have been packaged as legislative proposals and are going to be making their way through the process. The fifth recommendation was the affordable housing piece, but since the details for that have not been finalized, it is still under construction. This will be discussed later in the meeting.

Review Governor's Budget Recommendations

Four out of the five recommendations that came from this committee that are included in the Governor's supplemental budget are as follows:

- Ombudsperson for Agricultural and Food Processing Workers (DEED) (Maureen)
- AWWC Committee in Statute (DEED) (Maureen)
- MN OSHA Federal Penalty Conformity (DLI)
- Strengthen and Improve Fair Labor Standards for Agricultural and Food Processing Workers (DLI)

Maureen Ramirez provided a PowerPoint presentation (Located in the meeting documents) that included the AWWC budget items that belong to DEED.

Next Steps in the Legislative Process- What to expect

Two of the proposals: the Ombudsperson and the Extension of the AWC Committee are part of DEED's supplemental budget request. That means they are in the big package from DEED, and will be moving through the House Select Committee on Work Force, (Chair Mohamed Noor, and the ranking Republican minority lead Representative Rod Hamilton), and the Senate Jobs Committee, (Chair Eric Pratt and the ranking minority lead Senator Champion). DEED's government relations director, Darielle Dannen, and

her team, will advance the package and it is DEED's hope that these pieces and everything else that we have proposed in our big package will be included in the omnibus bill in each of those committees and will be rolled up into the omnibus bill for passage. On the DLI side, it is similar, the fair labor standards changes and the penalty conformity are part of DLI's agency proposal and will advance through committee as part of the larger request.

There are two legislative proposals from DLI. Both of these have a budget impact and will be put into a DLI budget bill similar to the DEED bill. DLI has a different set up on the house side but same on the senate side. The proposal will travel through the labor committee in the house that is chaired by Chair Ecklund and in the senate, it will go through Chair Pratt's committee. The penalty conformity does have a budget impact, but it is not asking for money instead adding more in revenue. The fair labor standards piece does have a budget impact in the form of additional DLI staff and outreach resources. The language has been submitted, and DLI is waiting to get the final ok. Much of it is in alignment with the specifics that were voted and approved by the committee.

Food and Farm Worker's Relief Grant application MDA

This is a new one-time grant program from USDA. The idea is to issue flat-rate payments of 600 to farm and food workers who worked through Covid. There are two separate programs. The one MDA is not going to pursue is a 20-million-dollar pilot scale project for grocery store workers due to the fact that it is a pilot project. If down the road USDA comes up with funding for workers, MDA would be happy to be involved.

Farm and meat packing employees are eligible for 645 million in the larger program, with a minimum award of 5 million. This means thousands of workers can be paid here in Minnesota. Workers in the following 3 buckets will be eligible: field, livestock, and meat packing. Grants are for employees, not for managers or owners. Our team has spent a lot of time seeking clarification from USDA on who is and isn't eligible. MDA is not the first choice to be the lead applicant for this program. This is not the Department of Agriculture's strong suit, but when the program came to MDA's attention, we reached out to a lot of people we thought might be logical applicants and found that there weren't many people who were applicants, but a lot that supported it in Minnesota. MDA will be the lead applicant, but we're going to need a lot of help, so we've reached out to a number of potential partners and put together a team of people to assist us. There are several partners on this call, including Lorrie and DEED, the Latino Economic Development Commission LEDC, the Initiative Foundation, the Region 5 Development Commission, and the Southern MN Initiative Foundation. Last week or two, MDA staff met with the Migrant Services Consortium, and a lot of organizations with potential applicants were presented. Applications must be submitted by March 10th. Projects could start this summer, most likely in June when awards are announced. Should we be successful, we have two years to implement the project. Getting workers money as soon as possible is part of the goal.

Linked here: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/ffwr>

Next Steps

Our next meeting will be on March 7th, and moving forward meetings will be once a month for 1 hour and 15 min.

Public Comments

No one from the public commented.

Final Thoughts

Committee member Jim Gleb expressed gratitude for hearing the update and everything that is being done to help the people the committee intends to help.

Adjourn