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For Immediate Release

AFOP to Congress: Prohibit Child Labor on U.S. Tobacco Farms

The Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs supports proposed legislation to protect children from the dangers of tobacco farming

April 17, 2015 Washington, D.C.— Yesterday, U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) and U.S. Representative David Cicilline (D-RI) introduced legislation to protect child workers from the dangers of exposure to tobacco plants, which can include acute nicotine poisoning and other long term health effects. The Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs (AFOP) supports the proposed legislation, and calls on Congress to swiftly pass the bills.

Senator Durbin's Bill S. 974 and Cicilline's Bill HR 1848, "The Children Don't Belong on Tobacco Farms Act," amends the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) to prohibit children under the age of 18 from coming into direct contact with tobacco plants or dried tobacco leaves. Cicilline introduced similar legislation during the last Congress.

Under current U.S. labor law, children as young as 12 are allowed to work in tobacco farms with few restrictions, leaving them vulnerable to nicotine poisoning or other health risks associated with tobacco farming. Human Rights Watch published a [report](#) in May 2014 in which 141 child tobacco workers from North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia were interviewed about their working conditions. According to their testimonies, children were exposed to high levels of pesticides and nicotine, worked for long hours and low wages. They described nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, dizziness, lightheadedness, headaches, and sleeplessness while working on tobacco farms – all symptoms consistent with acute nicotine poisoning.

AFOP Executive Director Daniel Sheehan applauded the introduction of the Durbin and Cicilline bills saying, "We now understand better than ever the dangers children face in working in tobacco. AFOP and its many partners seeking to change the policies allowing such child labor expressly urge Congress to adopt this critical legislation without delay in order to stop farmworker children's exposure to the dangers of tobacco work."

In recent months, major U.S. tobacco companies, including Reynolds American and Altria Group, have recognized the risks to children and adopted new policies to bar the employment of children under the age of 16 in tobacco cultivation. But these voluntary policies are not enough. To protect children's health, Congress needs to prohibit child labor in U.S. tobacco farming by amending the FLSA. The bills would codify this implicit agreement that a tobacco farm is no place for children to work.

"The Children Don't Belong on Tobacco Farms Act" is supported by more than fifty organizations, including AFOP. A full list is available [here](#).

The Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs' (AFOP) Children in the Fields Campaign strives to improve the quality of life of migrant and seasonal farmworker children by advocating for enhanced educational opportunities and the

elimination of discriminatory federal child labor laws in agriculture. For additional comment or an interview with an AFOP expert, please contact Robert Crumley, Director of Communications at (202) 828-6006 x140 or crumley@afop.org or Norma Flores, Director of the Children in the Fields Campaign at (202) 828-6000 x106 or Flores@afop.org.

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