



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

DATE: 09/27/2021

MINUTES PREPARED BY: CINTHIA MARTINEZ

Attendance

Committee Members

Present

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

Hamse Warfa, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development

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

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

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

Rodolfo Gutierrez, Executive Director, HACER

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

Susan Bishop, Supervisor, Minnesota Department of Health, and Migrant Agricultural Worker Response Lead, ICS

Tamara Nelsen, Executive Director, Minnesota AgriGrowth Council

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

Absent

Andrea Vaubel, Deputy Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Emilia Gonzalez Avalos, Executive Director, Unidos MN

Gary Wertish, President, Minnesota Farmers Union

Kevin Paap, President, Minnesota Farm Bureau

Kristi Halvarson, Executive Director, Community Health Service, Inc.

Staff Present: Ben Wood, Safety Consultant Principal, Minnesota's Workplace Safety Consultation Unit; Carrie Rigdon, Operations and Planning Section Manager, Minnesota Department of Agriculture; 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; Maureen Ramirez, Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development; Mike Zastoupil, Food Access Associate, Minnesota Department of Health

Guests Present: No public guests introduced themselves.

Agenda

1:00 PM **Welcome**
1:05 PM **Guest Introductions**
1:10 PM **Approve Minutes & Agenda**
1:15 PM **Updates – DC Warfa**
1:25 PM **Workgroup Updates**
1:35 PM **Data Working Group proposal for ARPA Funds**
1:40PM **Migrant Services Consortium Input**
2:15 PM **Fair Labor Standards Presentations**
2:45 PM **Discussion**
2:50 PM **Public Comments**
2:55 PM **Final Thoughts & Next Steps**
3:00 PM **Adjourn**

Meeting notes

Guest Introductions

No members of the public introduced themselves.

Approve Minutes & Agenda

Approved.

Updates- DC Warfa

DC Warfa was able to get clarification, from the Governor's office, on the length of terms and replacement questions from the last committee discussion. The committee does not end December 1st when the recommendations are due, the expiration date is April 3rd, 2023, the term for the Committee member does not end until the expiration date. If a staff member retires or leaves the successor becomes a member of this Committee and will take their place.

Andrea Vaubel is not able to attend this AWWC meeting, because of conflicting meetings. Carrie Rigdon sends a message in her place.

The Commissioner's office wants to reinforce the importance of Committee members getting input from their entity or people their organization represents. It is important to have a broad perspective. Some ways to do this could include connecting with the workgroups formed, rethinking a more central location for input, thinking of how voices can be incorporated into the process, etc.

Work Group updates

SharePoint Site availability for workgroups reminder (Carrie Rigdon)

The Committee members and staff have access to sharing resources in SharePoint. As a reminder, anything that is put on this site is subject to Government data and is accessible to the public.

Housing Workgroup (Sarah Blissenbach)

- Committee includes Colin Laffey, Nicole Blissenbach, Sarah Berry.
- Discussion circled to 4 main ideas:
 1. Possibility of funds/grants focused on employer-provided safety improvements in housing
 2. Targeted housing finance to rural MN areas with large ag worker presence for affordability/availability that is not employer owned
 3. Better documenting of where housing exists (employer owned)

4. What regulations can we put on housing to make it better and what agency does that belong under?
- Workgroup members would like to hear feedback from the employer group.
 - The next meeting is Monday Oct 4th, members from MDH will be included in the invite.

Workplace Safety Workgroup (Mike Zastoupil)

- Committee include Rodolfo Gutierrez, Kiza Olsen, Rena Wong, Jim Gleb, and Nicole Blissenbach
- Staff support include Mike Zastoupil, and Ben Wood.
- First meeting held on Thursday September 30th

Agenda was moved to accommodate Maureen Ramirez's availability

Fair Labor Standards Presentations

Jessica Grosz, Director of Labor Standards and Apprenticeship – Fair Labor: Agricultural Workers and Food Processing Workers

(Presentation will be in the meeting documents)

Audel Shokohzadeh, Community Engagement Director – Know Your Civil Rights

(Presentation will be in the meeting documents)

Ben Wood, Safety Consultant Principal- Overview of “OSHA” Whistleblower Protections

(Presentation will be in the meeting documents)

Discussion

Question 1: What specific workplace safety issues should the Committee address?

- Enforcement and Increase of penalties
- Support for employees
- Consistency
- Compliance checks and getting access to the employees
- Labor issues that were in the spotlight during the pandemic
- Education for employees and employers of laws
- Building trust

Question 2: What ideas do you have for policy solutions that address these specific workplace safety issues?

Question 3: What other information do you need to make good policy recommendations for these workplace safety issues?

Questions/Discussion on fair labor standards included:

- Where is the funding for enforcement?
- How do we create a system that honors both employees and employers?
- What is an additional piece to gain the trust of the employees so they will reach out?
- We have advanced good protections for workers in law, but where do we need to update penalties?

- More attorneys – Agricultural office enforcement authority under migrant labor statues wage theft unit currently has 1 or 2 attorneys and maybe 1 or 2 support staff. For the size of the migrant seasonal worker population is that enough? Can we check about other resources needed?
- Is there an easy place to see the different standards? A summary or chart? Can we see what exists and what enforcement exists side-by-side

Data Working group for ARPA Funds

Federal dollars are coming into the state and the Governor's office is running a solicitation on what ARPA funds should be spent on. The Committee wants to put together a one-time investment survey recommendation to put in our report.

Committee members Rodolfo Gutierrez, Tamara Nelson, and staff member Maureen Ramirez will meet to brainstorm ideas on what an ARPA proposal survey will look like and will bring it back to AWWC.

Migrant Services Consortium input

This executive order outlines that AWWC will engage with the Migrant Services Consortium, a monthly gathering of practitioners. To do that, we're engaged in a survey asking the members of the consortium about specific policy recommendations, specific issues they see, their experiences, and sort of idea collection so that we can summarize the results. During the October and November meetings of that consortium, we will have the opportunity to share what is happening here and to try to strengthen these working relationships.

Public Comments

No one from the public made comments.

Final Thoughts & Next Steps

The Committee formed a Fair Labor work group that included Susan Bishop, Jessica Grosz, Rena Wong, Nicole Blissenbach, and Colin Laffey.

Adjourn