

February 20th, 2024

Dear members of the Senate Economic Development Committee:

I am a farmworker in Vermont and a community leader in Migrant Justice. I write to tell you about the reality that our community faces because we can't rent houses or apartments without a social security number.

It's important that you understand that there are many difficulties and problems that farmworkers face. As you know, we are excluded from minimum wage and many of us are paid below minimum wages. Farm work is particularly hard for women, who are paid less.

Oftentimes I have wanted to leave my farm to find other work, in order to provide for my children, but I face the reality that because I'm an immigrant and I don't have a social security number, I can't find a place to rent. We are forced into a system where we have to stay where we are and suffer abuses.

In my experience, our rights as tenants living on farms aren't taken into account. If something breaks down, it's never fixed. You have to beg your employer to make any changes. I would like to see a change, to live in a house where my rights as a tenant are respected, where I can feel safe with my family.

The reality is that things are difficult for us and the fact of facing discrimination in these ways adds a lot of stress to our lives. For the simple fact of not finding anywhere to live off of the farm, we are forced to live in conditions where we don't have any privacy or security for our children or families.

I have been living in these conditions on farms for the past nine years and I would like to leave, to have my own house, for my family, where I can have privacy and security. As a mother, I want to see my children grow up in a place where they aren't stuck on a farm, where they can't spend time with their friends. Sometimes my son will tell me that he wants us to move to St. Albans, but I know that it's not easy.

I hope that you will listen to us and protect our rights. We are part of Vermont, we support the state in many different ways and we hope that the state will now support us. You have an opportunity to address the challenges that we face. Please think of our families that are suffering and make a decision with us in mind.

Thank you,

Luisa B.