

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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***ADVOCATES AND LEGISLATORS PUSH FOR INCREASED PAY AND PROTECTIONS
FOR ESSENTIAL AGRICULTURAL WORKERS***

Heat stress prevention and minimum wage legislation will support workers in Virginia.

Richmond, VA — Today, at a press conference at the General Assembly building, advocates and legislators joined together to call for the passage of heat stress prevention and minimum wage bills during the 2025 session.

Virginia’s outdoor workers, including those who ensure produce gets from the farm to the store, increasingly suffer from heat stress and related illnesses, but protections under current state law are sparse and insufficient. Delegate Hernandez and Senator Hashmi are championing legislation that directs the Virginia Safety and Health Codes Board, in consultation with the Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI), to create a list of industries whose workers are more likely to experience heat illnesses, convene an advisory panel to assist with developing regulations, and adopt regulations for heat illness prevention. The bill also contains a civil right of action to hold those employers accountable for violations of these regulations, with damages of \$1000 per violation.

Virginia also continues to exempt farmworkers and workers on H-2 visas from the Virginia Minimum Wage Act (“VMWA”) protections. Virginia’s minimum wage law explicitly carves out farmworkers, meaning that while nearly every other worker in the Commonwealth can’t be paid less than \$12.41/hr., farmworkers and H-2A visa holders can be paid only the federal minimum wage of \$7.25/hr. This exemption is a vestige of Jim Crow-era rulemaking, and HB 1625, proposed by Delegate McClure, removes it from the VMWA.

*"This legislation represents a significant step forward in advancing workplace health and safety standards, and as Virginians, we must remain committed to supporting policies that prioritize the welfare of all workers," said **Senator Hashmi**. "The measures outlined in the bill help safeguard workers from the severe effects of extreme heat, including heat exhaustion and heat stroke, which can be life-threatening. Simple actions such as providing shade, water, and rest during periods of extreme heat help to prevent debilitating illnesses and, most importantly, save lives."*

*“Across the Commonwealth, hard-working men and women get up every day and take on tough jobs to provide for their kids and pursue a better future. Virginia is made better because of them, and they deserve the dignity of a safe workplace,” said **Delegate Hernandez**. “This means simple things like shade, water, and rest to prevent heat stress and heat stroke. I’m proud to be leading the effort to institute the first set of heat illness protections in the history of the Commonwealth. Our workers deserve it.*

*“The Commonwealth's farmworkers do the hard work that we all depend on, whether we recognize it or not,” **Delegate McClure** said. “We rely on them to put food on our tables and bolster our shared economy. Now, with the bill I’ve introduced, we have the opportunity to do right by these indispensable workers by paying them a minimum wage and removing a vestige of the Jim Crow era from the books once and for all. We can continue to invest in our farms while also beginning to invest in our farmworkers.”*

*“It’s well past time for Virginia to end this discriminatory exemption from our minimum wage laws. These workers do backbreaking work in extreme conditions and deserve to be paid the same as everyone else in our state,” said **Jason Yarashes, Co-Director of LAJC’s Worker Justice Program**.*

Latest information on the legislation:

- **HB 1980** (Del. Hernandez) / **SB 1103** (Sen. Hashmi) Preventing heat illness for workers. *Both are still moving through their respective chambers*
- **HB 1625** (Del. McClure) Including farmworkers and temporary workers in our minimum wage laws. *Has passed the House and will crossover*

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