



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: AUG. 18, 2016

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Ohio establishes running water requirement for migrant farmworker housing

Columbus, Ohio — The Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR) recently instituted new rules regarding the facility requirements for agricultural labor camps in Ohio. Agricultural labor camps, which are regulated by the Ohio Department of Health, are temporary living quarters that house migrant farmworkers.

Following years of debate between growers, farmworker advocates and health advocates, changes have been formally adopted to require hot and cold running water in existing housing units within the next five years. Additionally, growers will need to ensure for next year's growing season that beds are elevated and smoke detectors are installed in the units.

“Having access to running water is a basic need that is essential to advancing public health,” said Latino Affairs Commission Chairman Tony Ortiz. “The ability to wash one’s hands and safely prepare food is critical to combating the spread of disease in Ohio.”

There are 104 agricultural labor camps in Ohio that provide housing to thousands of migrant and seasonal workers across the state. Huron, Sandusky, Stark and Wood Counties house the largest share of Ohio’s migrant workers. Several other states, including Michigan, Indiana and Pennsylvania already require running water in individual housing units.

“Improving housing standards for migrant farmworkers living in agricultural camps is important,” said Eugenio Mollo, Jr., Managing Attorney of the Agricultural Worker and Immigrant Rights Practice Group at Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. (ABLE). Mollo was also a member of the Ohio Department of Health Agricultural Labor Camp Rule Review Committee. “Safe and decent housing for farmworkers helps to secure a steady flow of workers, which is key to maintain agriculture as Ohio’s top industry.”

“It is also our obligation to ensure food safety for the public,” he added. “In addition, improving housing conditions advances our commitment to the health and safety of agricultural workers and their families. Nobody eats unless farmworkers work.”

Other new standards include a requirement for toilet partitions to be installed in communal bathrooms, and for privies to be emptied on a weekly basis at minimum.

The Ohio Department of Health adopts and enforces the rules that govern housing conditions in agricultural labor camps. The rule review process occurs every five years, with the next review occurring in 2018.

About the Ohio Latino Affairs Commission

The Ohio Commission on Hispanic/Latino Affairs is an organization that 1) advises state government on issues affecting Hispanic Ohioans, 2) connects the diverse Latino communities across the state and, 3) builds the capacity of community organizations so they may better serve the fast growing Latino population of Ohio.