



## FIRST FOCUS

CAMPAIGN FOR CHILDREN

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The Honorable Dick Durbin  
United States Senate  
711 Hart Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David N. Cicilline  
United States House of Representatives  
128 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D. C. 20515

April 16, 2015

Dear Senator Durbin and Representative Cicilline:

On behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal policy and budget decisions, I would like to pass on our strong endorsement of the Children Don't Belong on Tobacco Farms Act. This bill addresses the urgent need to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 by prohibiting work by children in tobacco-related agriculture. This bill will help ensure the safety, health, and overall well-being of child farmworkers who are currently being exposed to the dangers of working in tobacco fields.

The introduction of the Children Don't Belong on Tobacco Farms Act comes at an important time. Over 500,000 children and teenagers toil in agriculture, one of the most dangerous work industries in America. According to a recent Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, children as young as seven are working in U.S. tobacco fields, and children as young as eleven and twelve are working 10-12 work days. Children interviewed by HRW described working in extreme heat, using sharp tools and heavy machinery, and working at heights of more than one story in curing barns. More than half of the children interviewed reported being exposed to toxic pesticides, and three-quarters of the children reported vomiting, nausea, headaches, and dizziness while working on tobacco farms, symptoms consistent with acute nicotine poisoning. Research shows that exposure to neurotoxins at a young age can put child farmworkers at risk of cancer, depression, neurologic deficits, and reproductive health problems. This bill would amend the Fair Labor Standards Act to include in the definition of "particularly hazardous oppressive child labor" any employment in which children under the age of 18 come into direct contact with tobacco plants or dried tobacco leaves.

As an organization dedicated to ensuring that our labor laws uphold the safety of all children in the United States, we thank you again for your leadership on behalf of vulnerable child farmworkers. We look forward to working

with you to pass this important bill, which takes a critical first step in improving conditions for children laboring in U.S. agriculture.

Sincerely,

*Bruce Lesley*

Bruce Lesley  
President