Dear Senator/Representative:

We write to you as organizations representing millions of Americans, including teachers, healthcare professionals, workers, farmworkers, and advocates concerned about children’s safety. We are alarmed at reports that children are risking acute nicotine poisoning and other health and safety hazards in US tobacco fields. We urge you to co-sponsor the **Children Don’t Belong in Tobacco Fields Act**, which would prohibit children under the age of 18 from employment that brings them into direct contact with tobacco. This legislation would not affect children working on their family’s farm.

A study released last year by Human Rights Watch found that child tobacco workers on US farms are exposed to nicotine, toxic pesticides, extreme heat, and other dangers. Nearly three-quarters of the child tobacco workers they interviewed had experienced symptoms including nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, headaches, dizziness, difficulty breathing, skin rashes, and irritation to their eyes and mouths. Many of these symptoms are consistent with acute nicotine poisoning, also known as Green Tobacco Sickness.

According to a new bulletin published by OSHA and NIOSH, children and adolescents who handle tobacco may be more sensitive to chemical exposures, more likely to suffer from green tobacco sickness, and may suffer more serious health effects than adults. Public health experts have found that nicotine exposure in adolescence can cause mood disorders and lasting deficits in cognition. In addition, several pesticides commonly used during tobacco farming are known neurotoxins, which can cause cancer, depression, neurologic deficits, and reproductive health problems.

Children don’t belong in tobacco fields. Children can’t legally purchase cigarettes until they are 18, yet current US law allows children as young as 12 to work unlimited hours outside of school on a farm of any size, and has no minimum age for children to work on small farms. In addition, the US has no regulations to protect child farmworkers from nicotine exposure.

In recent months, major US tobacco companies, including Reynolds American and Altria Group, have recognized the risks to children and adopted new policies to bar the employment of children under the age of 16 in tobacco cultivation. But these voluntary policies are not enough.

Please help protect children’s health by joining Senator Durbin and Congressman Cicilline in co-sponsoring the Children Don’t Belong in Tobacco Fields Act.

Sincerely,

A World at School

Advocates for Children and Youth

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees

American Federation of Teachers

Arkansas Human Development Corporation

Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs

California Human Development

Center for Employment Training

Child Labor Coalition

Children’s Health Fund

Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles

Farmworker Association of Florida

Farmworker Justice

First Focus Campaign for Children

Food Chain Workers Alliance

Free the Slaves

Global Campaign for Education - US

HELP New Mexico, Inc.

Human Rights Watch

International Labor Rights Forum

Labor Coalition for Latin American Advancement

MAFO, Inc. a National Partnership of Farmworker and Rural Organizations

Media Voices for Children

Migrant Clinicians Network

Mississippi Delta Council for Farmworkers Opportunities, Inc.

NC Field

NAACP

National Center for Farmworker Health

National Consumers League

National Council for Latin American Advancement

National Council for Occupational Safety and Health

National Council of La Raza

National Education Association

National Employment Law Project

National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Association

NC Justice Center

Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) of Washington State

Oregon Human Development Corporation

ORO Development Corporation (Oklahoma)

Oxfam America

PathStone Corporation

Polaris Project

Ramsay Merriam Fund

Rukmini Foundation

Student Action with Farmworkers

Telamon Corporation (Virginia)

Texans Care for Children

United Mine Workers of America

West Virginia University Injury Control Research Center

Worker Justice Center of New York

Worksafe (California)