



# NC STATE AFL★CIO

## NORTH CAROLINA'S UNIONS

North Carolina State  
American Federation  
of Labor and  
Congress of Industrial  
Organizations

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**MaryBe McMillan**  
President

### Executive Board

Rick Armstrong, IBT  
Rob Axford, IBEW  
Janice Barnes, USW  
Andre Barnett, UFCW  
Harold Black, CWA  
Daniel Dashman, IATSE  
Jackie Davis, SEIU Workers  
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Terrence Dewberry, ATU  
Randy Fulk, BCTGM  
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Alvin Warwick, Building Trades  
Grant Welch, CWA  
Denicia Montford Williams,  
Constituency Groups  
Tony Wilson, APWU  
Leticia Zavala, FLOC

October 23, 2020

To North Carolina officials,

We call on our elected state leaders to take action to protect all essential workers, many of whom are working in unsafe conditions to keep North Carolina's economy running in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. These workers, while deemed essential, have been too often forced to work without adequate personal protective equipment, in crowded and poorly ventilated conditions, and without wellness checks. The Department of Labor has the power to enact an emergency infectious disease standard, to improve working conditions, and to save the lives of our workers, their families, and their communities. The time has come for our leaders to stop prioritizing corporate interests and start protecting our workers.

We call on Labor Commissioner Cherie Berry to take immediate action and enact an emergency infectious disease standard and to enforce workplace health and safety laws. Virginia's OSHA Department enacted an Emergency Temporary Standard in July. Commissioner Berry has the ability to mandate that employers abide by the CDC's guidance, which is currently voluntary and therefore determined on a workplace by workplace basis. The NC DOL's purpose is to issue and enforce workplace protections, hold employers accountable, and investigate complaints of unsafe work practices. Commissioner Berry's refusal to move forward with a comprehensive rule is an act of extreme irresponsibility that unnecessarily puts the lives of workers and their families at risk. Commissioner Berry has the power to keep workers safe. Worker safety should be her priority in the midst of this devastating global pandemic.

In the absence of action on the part of Commissioner Berry we call on Governor Cooper to issue an Executive Order to protect all our workers. Similar to Governor Whitmer in Michigan, Governor Cooper has the power to step up in the absence of action on the part of the NC DOL and NC OSHA to ensure that workers are provided protections to keep themselves, their families, and their workplaces safe. As North Carolina's economy reopens in a phased approach the lives of North Carolina workers cannot be the sacrificed for the sake of the state's economic well-being.

Similarly in the absence of Commissioner Berry's willingness to enact an Emergency Temporary Standard we call on Secretary Mandy Cohen of the Department of Health and Human Services to protect the health of all North Carolinians by mandating employer compliance with public health guidelines. The NC DHHS should develop a comprehensive and thorough plan for testing all workers, which is crucial to prevent widespread outbreaks, especially for those workers for whom social distancing is not possible.

Our state officials have an obligation to ensure that the lives and livelihood of essential workers are prioritized. Protect our workers, our families and our communities. The time to act is now.



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Sincerely,

Campbell University Public Health

Clean Water for North Carolina

Chatham County Food Council

Farmworker Advocacy Network

Gov. Acct. Project/Food Integrity Campaign

Natural Resources Defense Council

NC State AFL-CIO

NC FIELD, Inc.

North Carolina Council of Churches

North Carolina Justice Center

Orange County Food Council

Rural Advancement Foundation International, USA

Student Action with Farmworkers

The Greater Good Garden & Grocery

Toxic Free NC

Triangle Friends of Farmworkers

Western North Carolina Workers' Center

Yadkin Riverkeeper