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STONE INTRODUCES AB 616: ALLOWING FARM WORKERS TO VOTE BY MAIL IN UNION ELECTIONS

SACRAMENTO—Assemblymember Mark Stone (D-Monterey Bay) has introduced legislation to support farm workers as they exercise their right to vote in union elections. AB 616 would allow farm workers to choose if they want to vote at a physical location, or vote by mailing or dropping off a representation ballot card to the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB) office.

Farm workers were excluded from federal labor laws, so they did not have the right to choose if they wanted to be represented by a union in California until the passage of the 1975 Agricultural Labor Relations Act. Because they were excluded from federal labor laws, farm workers in California rely on state statutory changes to the agricultural labor relations law for collective bargaining protections.

Under current law, farm workers vote on union representation in elections that are held via secret ballot at polling places designated by the ALRB, which are usually at the place of employment.

This bill will modernize the Agricultural Labor Relations Act to facilitate the ability of farmworkers to exercise their right to vote for or against union representation by allowing them to vote using ballot cards.

“The Legislature has successfully enacted a series of changes that have made it easier for Californians to participate in statewide elections, including mail-in voting. These changes were made based on the simple premise that facilitating the exercise of an existing right is inherently a good thing to do,” said Stone. “This bill applies that same principle and extends voting flexibilities to farm workers as they exercise their longstanding right to vote in union representation elections.”

“As Secretary of State, I was proud to support and implement changes in state law to make it easier for people to exercise their right to vote,” said U.S. Senator Alex Padilla. “Farm workers should have similar opportunities as they exercise their longstanding right to vote in a union representation, and the Agricultural Labor Relations Voting Choice Act would modernize the process and expand voting accessibility for farm workers in California.”

“California leads the nation in making it easier for people to exercise their right to vote. Assemblyman Mark Stone’s legislation will make it easier for farm workers to exercise their right to vote in Agricultural Labor Relations Act elections,” said Teresa Romero, President, United Farm Workers.

“The Agricultural Labor Relations Voting Choice Act will provide our essential farm workers a better platform to fight for fair wages, benefits, working conditions, and more,” said principal co-author and Chair of the Senate Labor Committee, Senator Dave Cortese.

AB 616 now awaits referral to a policy committee.

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