

# Durbin and Cicilline: Tobacco farms are no place for kids

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WASHINGTON – On World Day Against Child Labor, U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) and U.S. Representative David Cicilline (D-RI) reintroduced legislation to protect child laborers from the dangers of exposure to tobacco plants, which can include acute nicotine poisoning and other long-term health effects.

The U.S. currently has no specific restrictions to protect children from nicotine poisoning or other health risks associated with tobacco farming. The *Children Don't*

*Belong on Tobacco Farms Act* amends the Fair Labor Standards Act to prohibit children under the age of 18 from coming into direct contact with tobacco plants or dried tobacco leaves.

**“We have known for decades that tobacco companies have no qualms marketing their deadly products to minors, but Big Tobacco’s willingness to exploit children for profit doesn’t end there,”** Durbin said. **“Child tobacco workers – some as young as eleven or twelve – risk nicotine poisoning and long-term health consequences from handling tobacco plants. We must take immediate action to protect these children before it’s too late.”**

**“In 2017, there is no reason for children to be working on tobacco farms. We already know the dangers of exposure to tobacco and nicotine. It’s time we do something about it,”** said Cicilline. **“I’m proud to be introducing this bill with Senator Durbin today. I know that we will both continue to stand up against this harmful practice.”**

Joining Senator Durbin and Representative Cicilline are Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Ed Markey (D-MA), and Jack Reed (D-RI) and Representatives Katherine Clark (D-MA), Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ), Luis Gutiérrez (D-IL), Alcee Hastings (D-FL), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Mark Pocan (D-WI), Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA), and Mark Takano (D-CA).

Although U.S. law prohibits children under the age of 18 from buying cigarettes, children as young as 12 are permitted to work in tobacco fields, where handling tobacco plants can lead to nicotine poisoning. Tobacco companies and growers’ associations in the U.S. recently adopted voluntary standards to limit child labor in tobacco work. This bill would codify this implicit agreement that a tobacco farm is no place for children to work.

A 2015 Human Rights Watch study based on interviews with thirty-three children working in North Carolina tobacco farms found that:

- Children working on tobacco farms worked up to 50-60 hours per week;
- Children experienced nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, dizziness, lightheadedness, headaches, and sleeplessness while working on tobacco farms;
- Children worked in hot conditions with jobs ranging from harvesting tobacco plants to applying toxic pesticides;
- Children are directly exposed to those pesticides from spraying fields. Many pesticides used in tobacco production are known neurotoxins. Long-term effects include cancer, neurological deficits, and reproductive health problems.