



Durbin, Delauro Introduce Bill To Ban Child Labor On Tobacco Farms

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WASHINGTON – In observation of World Day Against Child Labor, U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) and U.S. Representative Rosa DeLauro (D-CT-03) today reintroduced legislation to protect child workers from the dangers of exposure to tobacco plants, including nicotine poisoning. The *Children Don't Belong on Tobacco Farms Act* amends the *Fair Labor Standards Act* to prohibit children under the age of 18 from working in tobacco fields and coming into direct contact with tobacco plants or dried tobacco leaves by deeming this type of work as oppressive child labor.

“Kids as young as 12 can be recruited to work on tobacco farms where they are exposed to serious health risks like nicotine poisoning and other long-term health effects. Putting a stop to this disgraceful labor practice is common sense,” Durbin said. “I’m hopeful that with the *Children Don't Belong on Tobacco Farms Act*, Congress can finally act to protect these kids before it’s too late.”

“For too long, Big Tobacco has targeted children to buy their deadly products and to work their farms. Children as young as 12 are working tobacco fields, exposing themselves to harmful nicotine poisoning that can have serious short-term and long-term health effects,” said DeLauro. “I am proud to join Senator Durbin in introducing the *Children Don't Belong on Tobacco Farms Act*, to finally prohibit children under the age of 18 from working in tobacco fields. It is time we prioritize the health and well-being of children over Big Tobacco’s profits.”

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. have adopted voluntary standards to limit child labor in tobacco work. However, researchers found that children under 16 were still working in tobacco more

than a year after many companies announced that they would prohibit hiring workers younger than that age. 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 33 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.

Along with Durbin, U.S. Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) are cosponsors of the *Children Don't Belong on Tobacco Farms Act*.