

## **Heat Stress Regional Information Hearings Maryland Occupational Safety and Health (MOSH) Division of Labor and Industry**

**Submitted by M. Isabelle Chaudry**

I am writing on behalf of the Center for Progressive Reform (CPR), a network of more than 60 scholars from across the United States who work with a professional staff to improve public protections, environmental health, and workplace safety. Since 2002, CPR has been working with advocacy allies to create powerful tools and strategies for policymakers and the public to advance just, equitable policies that ensure the well-being of workers.

We are pleased that Maryland will issue a standard requiring employers to protect workers from heat-related illnesses this session. While all workers in outside and unconditioned indoor spaces will benefit from a statewide standard, we urge you to promulgate a strong heat standard in Maryland that considers the unique health and safety concerns of workers employed in agriculture.

Farmworkers are predominantly Black and brown, including many from Indigenous and Afro-descended backgrounds, and they often earn wages below the federal poverty level. Farmworkers play an important role in our nation's agricultural success, and we must do all we can to ensure adequate safeguards for their health.

Those who work outside are most vulnerable to heat illnesses. These workers, especially migrant farmworkers of color, are socially isolated and economically disadvantaged and often have chronic illnesses. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)), farmworkers are 20 times more likely to die from heat stress than workers in other industries. Most of these deaths occur in men between the ages of 20 and 54.

Farmworkers earn low incomes and may not be authorized to work in the United States, which can cause fear of job loss and even deportation if they complain of or report poor working conditions. Much of the risk to farmworkers is due the nature of their work:

1. Farmworkers labor outside for long hours, largely during the hottest time of the year. Due to climate change, we continue to see both record high temperatures and a record number of days at extreme high temperatures every year. For farmworkers, extreme heat is not a future threat; it is a present danger that already impacts their daily lives.
2. Many farmworkers are paid by the weight of produce picked, a system that discourages rest and bathroom breaks because time away from manual labor results in lower pay.
3. Recent studies show that workers are showing up to work significantly dehydrated and becoming even more dehydrated as the workday progresses. Many farmworkers do not have air conditioning at home, limiting their ability to cool down after work. Remaining in a hot environment contribute to workers arriving to their jobs already dehydrated.

4. Many farmworkers also work with pesticides and must wear heavy protective clothing that is not conducive to staying cool.

The Maryland Occupational Safety and Health (MOSH) Division must develop a heat stress rule by October 2022. There is no reason to wait. MOSH should promulgate a standard before next summer so more workers don't suffer or die from heat illnesses. Virginia is in the process of developing its own heat stress standard now and should have it ready within six months. MOSH must do the same. We urge Maryland to act now on this issue. It's a matter of justice and equity. It's a matter of life and death.