

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 22, 2023

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor
State of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom,

We write to you today regarding the dire economic impact of Tropical Storm Hilary on undocumented individuals living in southern California's agricultural communities. We applaud your administration's recent efforts to expand aid to undocumented individuals impacted by natural disasters by establishing the state's new Storm Assistance for Immigrants program. However, eligibility under the program does not extend to those impacted by tropical storms. Given the acute impact of Hilary on undocumented individuals in our southern California farming communities, we strongly urge you to immediately expand eligibility under the Storm Assistance for Immigrants program to include those impacted by Tropical Storm Hilary.

Tropical Storm Hilary was the first storm of its kind to hit southern California in 84 years. In addition to harsh winds of up to 80 mph, the region faced unprecedented levels of rainfall – with some areas meeting their average annual rainfall in just a matter of days.¹ Among the hardest hit communities were in rural Coachella Valley, where much of the local economy is centered on agriculture. Throughout the valley, reports have surfaced of severe damage to certain unharvested crops.² For instance, the California Table Grape Commission estimates that the storm damaged 35 percent of the grapes that remained on vines, amounting to approximately 25 million boxes.³

The economic impact of such catastrophic crop damage in the middle of harvest season is not only felt by the growers, but also by the farmworkers they employ. Because a significant number of farmworkers are undocumented, they are ineligible for disaster aid and unemployment benefits. As growers in Coachella Valley are forced to revise their harvesting plans, the undocumented farmworkers that they typically employ are left without work, pay, or access to the critical social safety net programs intended to support our communities in times of crisis. Our undocumented populations are inherently vulnerable, and the financial uncertainty caused by

¹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/hilary-rainfall-totals-california-areas-almost-met-the-yearly-average-for-rain-inches/>

² <https://goldrushcam.com/sierrasuntimes/index.php/news/local-news/49702-california-farm-bureau-reports-tropical-storm-hilary-devastates-table-grape-crops-at-peak-of-harvest#:~:text=Tropical%20Storm%20Hilary%20hit%20during,the%20valley%20survived%20the%20storm.>

³ <https://www.freshfruitportal.com/news/2023/08/28/hilary-ruins-20-of-remaining-cal-grape-crop/>

Hilary is leaving many of these families to wonder how they will buy groceries or pay rent in the coming months.

Tropical Storm Hilary has had an acute and devastating economic impact on Coachella Valley's undocumented farmworkers and their families. This matter is urgent, ongoing, and requires swift action by our state leadership. To that end, we respectfully request that your administration take immediate action to expand eligibility under the Storm Assistance for Immigrants program to include those impacted by Hilary. Without access to emergency financial assistance, these farmworkers and their families will face continued – and potentially catastrophic – economic uncertainty.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adam B. Schiff". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Adam" and last name "Schiff" clearly legible.

Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Raul Ruiz". The signature is cursive and stylized, with the first name "Raul" and last name "Ruiz" clearly legible.

Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress