ASSEMBLY HEALTH COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 4505

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: AUGUST 24, 2020

The Assembly Health Committee reports favorably and with committee amendments Assembly Bill No. 4505.

As amended and reported, this bill makes a $5 million appropriation to the Department of Health (department) from federal block grant funds allocated to the State from the federal "Coronavirus Relief Fund," established pursuant to the federal "Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act," for use by the department to provide grants to farmers for the purchase or reimbursement of "personal protection equipment" as defined in the bill, to be provided to "farm workers" as defined in the bill, to protect against the COVID-19 virus. The bill also provides the Commissioner of Health (commissioner) the discretion to provide grants for the purchase of items or materials, other than personal protection equipment, that would improve the health and safety of farm workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, including improvements to housing or work stations.

The bill also permits the commissioner to issue stipends to farmworkers who get tested for the COVID-19 virus, test positive, and are required to quarantine, but do not qualify for paid sick days or unemployment insurance. The stipend is to be equal to half of the amount of pay that the farmworker would have received for two weeks of work on the farm, the period when they are quarantined. The stipend is not to be issued to an individual more than once.

Block grant funds distributed to states from the federal "Coronavirus Relief Fund," are to be used for costs associated with controlling the COVID-19 virus and mitigating the economic damage caused by the pandemic. This bill would provide assistance to owners and operators of farms to help ensure that the health of farm workers is protected and at the same time providing that one of the State's critical industries can continue to function safely during this crisis.

As reported by the committee, Assembly Bill No. 4505 is identical to Senate Bill No. 2596 (1R) which was reported by the committee on this date.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amendments make a technical change to the synopsis and allow for reimbursement, in addition to purchase, of personal protective equipment and other materials that improve the health and safety of farmworkers during the pandemic. The amendments clarify that improvements and planned improvements to housing and work stations are included in the type of improvements that qualify under the bill. Finally, the amendments give the Commissioner of Health the discretion to offer stipends to replace half of lost pay for farmworkers who test positive for COVID-19 and do not qualify for paid sick days or unemployment.