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# Essential Worker Status Documentation: An Option to Facilitate Travel in the COVID-19 Environment

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, the various states and jurisdictions are making different (and shifting) decisions regarding closure of businesses and other institutions. Such decisions may come within the auspices of a “shelter-in-place” or a “stay-at-home” order – all of which vary in content and impact.

Directives from state governments generally make reference to federal direction issued via the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The DHS has issued [guidance on critical infrastructure and essential workers](https://www.dhs.gov/coronavirus/cybersecurity-and-critical-infrastructure), [www.dhs.gov/coronavirus/cybersecurity-and-critical-infrastructure](https://www.dhs.gov/coronavirus/cybersecurity-and-critical-infrastructure), which includes the [food and agriculture sector](https://www.cisa.gov/food-and-agriculture-sector), [www.cisa.gov/food-and-agriculture-sector](https://www.cisa.gov/food-and-agriculture-sector). An [advisory memorandum](https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/CISA_Guidance_on_the_Essential_Critical_Infrastructure_Workforce_Version_2.0_Updated.pdf), [www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/CISA\\_Guidance\\_on\\_the\\_Essential\\_Critical\\_Infrastructure\\_Workforce\\_Version\\_2.0\\_Updated.pdf](https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/CISA_Guidance_on_the_Essential_Critical_Infrastructure_Workforce_Version_2.0_Updated.pdf), is available which identifies the essential critical infrastructure workers during the nation’s response to COVID-19. Multiple critical infrastructures are identified, including the food and agriculture sector; and within that sector, essential workers are specifically listed and described. Some of the most readily identifiable workers include farmers, farm workers, and agribusiness support service employees; persons engaged in producing and harvesting field crops; transportation of livestock, animal feed and many other related workers. Workers may be engaged in or employed by private businesses, government or non-governmental organizations. A complete, detailed list is [available on the DHS website](https://www.cisa.gov/publication/guidance-essential-critical-infrastructure-workforce), [www.cisa.gov/publication/guidance-essential-critical-infrastructure-workforce](https://www.cisa.gov/publication/guidance-essential-critical-infrastructure-workforce).

Whether employee travel documents are required by government agencies is dependent

on the specific language of an order issued by a jurisdiction (state or local). However, even where these documents are not required, some business owners and employers may have concerns about the ability of essential workers to travel freely to and from work or in the course of duties during various “shelter-in-place” or a “stay-at-home” orders. To alleviate this concern, some employers have chosen to issue letters or other identification to their essential workers which identify such individuals as essential workers employed in critical infrastructure. Such documents may be entirely optional, but are issued at the discretion of the employing organization.

To facilitate and assist employers who wish to provide such documentation, a framework is provided at the end of this publication with suggested language which may be used in a letter provided to an essential worker in the critical food and agriculture sector. Again, whether employee travel documents are required by government agencies will vary among jurisdictions, and guidance should be sought from such authorities or legal counsel. Where employers have issued such a letter to workers, some have chosen to laminate the document or place it into a clear plastic document sleeve for the convenience of the worker.

Employers may also choose to investigate a number of private businesses that offer manufacturing of employee identification cards (such as laminated, plastic ID cards on lanyards). These businesses may now be specializing in “essential worker” identification. Once again, this sort of employee identification is completely optional, but some employers may find this to be a convenient form of employee identification for this and related organizational security purposes.

*PLEASE NOTE: This article and the attached form is offered by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach as a suggested template only. The purpose is to provide employees or contract workers with documentation during the COVID-19 pandemic in support of essential functions and services of the employing organization. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach provides this suggested template form with no warranties of any nature and accepts no liability for its use. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach does not offer legal advice and explicitly states that this information is educational in nature and not intended to substitute for legal advice from a competent professional retained by an individual or organization for that purpose.*

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## **DOCUMENTATION OF EMPLOYMENT STATUS**

To Whom It May Concern:

The bearer of this document, [INSERT EMPLOYEE NAME],  
is an employee of [INSERT EMPLOYER NAME AND ADDRESS].

This individual's work is critical and essential during the on-going COVID-19 pandemic related to food and agriculture infrastructure, national health and the food supply chain. This individual should be allow to travel freely and perform their job functions.

Public authorities are respectfully requested to assist this individual in reaching their place of employment or otherwise perform necessary job functions. Thank you for your assistance.

If you have questions about this person's affiliation with  
[INSERT EMPLOYER NAME],  
please contact [INSERT NAME OF BUSINESS OWNER OR SUPERVISOR]  
at [INSERT CELL PHONE NUMBER].

EMPLOYER'S SIGNATURE:

PRINT NAME: [INSERT EMPLOYER'S PRINTED NAME]

DATE: [DATE FORM IS SIGNED]

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