

Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing:

My name is Kelsey Herrington. I am a resident of Biddeford and I am testifying in support of LD 398 and LD 525. I am a full-time farmer and farm employer. I co-own and operate Two Farmers Farm in Scarborough, which grows produce for local and regional wholesale markets and is the sole source of income for my family.

I started working on farms because I wanted a career in food production but I didn't want to be a business owner. However, the poor compensation, and unsafe and undignified working conditions I experienced directly, and observed on other farms, led me to conclude that working for myself was the only way to make a dignified living through farming. I share my experience not to advocate for small business ownership as a solution to labor exploitation, because it is not, but to demonstrate how commonplace the dehumanizing conditions of farm work are - they impact all types of workers on all types of farms. I also recognize that the challenging conditions I experienced pale in comparison to the brutality faced by many farmworkers who are systematically deprived of the privileges I have as a white, middle-class, US citizen.

What I keep hearing in agricultural industry spaces is that "everyone deserves to be treated fairly, but...", where "but" is followed by a variety of excuses that attempt to justify the dehumanizing conditions current Maine labor laws allow farm owners to subject farmworkers to. These excuses often claim that "family farms" or "farm communities" will suffer if all farm workers are given the basic rights and protections these bills provide.

But farms and farm communities are built through the labor of farm workers. Farmworkers literally create the value that allows farms to sustain themselves and expand, yet 25% of Maine farmworkers live in poverty. In spite of their hard work, long hours, and personal sacrifices in the face of such adversity, Maine farmworkers are not legally protected to advocate for themselves by organizing.

Every worker, including every farmworker, deserves to be treated with dignity, to be compensated well, and have the right to organize.

I urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 398 and LD 525.

Thank you

Kelsey Herrington