

Noami Brautigam
Monroe
LD 525

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

My name is Noami Brautigam. I am a resident of Monroe. My partner, James Gagne, and I own and operate Second Frost Farm, where we grow diversified vegetables with a crew of 3 seasonal employees. Before starting Second Frost Farm, I was a farmworker for about five years. Today I am testifying in support of LD 398 and LD 525 as both a farm owner/employer and also as a former farmworker.

I believe LD 398 and LD 525 should become law because all workers, including farmworkers deserve safe and dignified work and these protections for farmworkers will building a more resilient food system.

Before owning our farm, I worked for several amazing farmers around the state. I came to these farm jobs with the privileges of being white, from a middle class family, college educated, cis-gendered and with English as my first language. I loved farm work and as a farmworker I also found myself in a number of unsafe and undignified work situations including being expected to work longer days during heatwaves, being tasked with operating a tractor while a child rode on the transplanting attachment and working 55 hours per week for \$125 and off grid housing. I hope the experience of other farmworkers who come to their jobs with less or different privileges than I are heard today.

Some farmers will tell you these bills are not necessary because they have great relationships with their employees. While I am glad that many of my peers have mutually respectful relationships with their employees, these bills are not about individual relationships, are they? Of course there exist farm employers and employees who have very positive, non-exploitive relationships but the other reality is the current system in place also allows for farm employees to exploit their workers.

As the climate crisis worsens and working conditions become more severe due to extreme weather it is going to be increasingly important to have farmworker protections/ bargaining ability. This couldn't be more true for farmworkers in the Pacific Northwest who worked through 115 degree conditions last spring. As work environments become more dangerous, I want farmworkers in the state of Maine to be able to organize like the farmworkers in California did around demands such as more rigorous heat standards, undoubtedly saving lives.

Let us acknowledge that a sustainable food future is one that also includes the sustainability of its workforce. I urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 398 and LD 525 as a beginning to building a resilient, dignified food system.

Thank you,
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