

Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and distinguished members of the Committee on Labor and Housing,

My name is Michael Schaab and I live in Monroe, Maine. I strongly support the passage of LD 525. One of the fundamental pillars of our democracy is the ability to meet and organize in order to better our living and working conditions. The questions we must ask are: Why aren't our agricultural workers allowed to do so without fear of repercussion? Why don't farm workers have the same protections as other workers? And, equally important, what are the outcomes for this lack of fundamental freedom?

Approximately 25% of farm workers IN MAINE live in poverty. This is nearly 4.5 times greater than the rest of Maine's workforce<sup>1</sup>. Nationally, farm workers earned \$14.62 per hour in 2020, just 60 percent of what non-farm production and non-supervisory workers earned. Over 70% of investigations of farms conducted by the Wage and Hour Division (WHD) of the U.S. Department of Labor detect violations—things like wage theft and inadequate housing, as well as other violations of laws designed to protect farm workers.<sup>2</sup> Why do we let this continue?

At least 18 states have passed legislation that allows farm workers to organize for collective bargaining. Now is the time to bring Maine into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Now is the time to improve the working and living conditions of farm workers. Now is the time to treat farm workers with dignity and respect – the dignity and respect afforded other workers here in Maine. You are the people we have elected to represent ALL the people of Maine. I unequivocally and emphatically urge you to vote in support of this bill.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_2\\_County\\_Level/Maine/merefmap.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_2_County_Level/Maine/merefmap.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.epi.org/publication/ma-fairness-for-farmworkers-act-testimony/>