

April 18, 2023

Testimony from the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition ("MIRC") regarding:

- **LD 398:** An Act to Make Agricultural Workers and Other Related Workers Employees Under the Wage and Hour Laws
- **LD 525:** An Act to Protect Farm Workers by Allowing Them to Organize for the Purposes of Collective Bargaining
- **LD 1483:** An Act to Protect the Rights of Agricultural Workers

Dear Members of the Committee on Labor and Housing:

My name is Tobin Williamson and I am the Advocacy Manager with the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition. MIRC is a statewide network of almost 100 member organizations working to enhance the lives of Maine's immigrant communities. MIRC aspires to advance systemic changes in Maine through collaborative advocacy to ensure that voices of the state's large, diverse, and growing immigrant communities are heard.

A key segment of Maine's immigrant communities are its agricultural farm workers, often people originally from Central American or Caribbean nations who do enormously hard work for not enough money. From blueberry farmers in Washington County to vegetable farmers in York County and various places in between, immigrant agricultural workers are a pivotal part of Maine's economy.

Many farmworkers toil for wages that have not kept up with inflation. For too many of them, those wages were not that high to begin with. Compounding their often low pay are issues such as inadequate housing, wage theft, difficult if not unsafe working conditions, intimidation and harassment from employers, separation from friends and family, and other challenges. We are grateful that many Maine State Legislators have noticed the hard work done by Maine's agricultural workers and have proposed ways to improve their working conditions. Due to time constraints and the fact that all three share a public hearing time, I am submitting testimony in support of three bills at once:

- LD 398 provides they are covered by the same laws regarding overtime & wages as other workers
- LD 525 would increase their access to workers' rights for organization and collective bargaining
- LD 1483 provides protections for access to healthcare, education, legal services, and so on

In the peak days of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these folks were called "essential workers." They were people who continued to ensure we got the food and other products we needed to get by. Now more than ever before, they need to be treated to fair wage and hour laws, safe conditions, and access to worker rights. MIRC is proud to join organizations such as Mano en Mano, the Maine Center for Economic Policy, the Maine AFL/CIO, and more in support of these bills which would address those concerns.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Tobin Williamson
Lewiston, ME
MIRC Advocacy Manager

###