

Good Afternoon, Representatives. My name is Katie Schools and I live in Scarborough, Maine. I am currently an undergraduate student at University of Southern Maine. When I was 15, I got my first job on a family farm and went on to work there for the next five summers. I was good friends with the owner's daughter, and most of my friends worked on the farm with me. I became intimately familiar with what it means to be a working-class farmer, long days, no breaks, backbreaking labor, and work in any conditions, rain, shine, thunderstorm, anything. These experiences shaped who I am today and taught me the value of a strong work ethic, the beauty of rural life, and the beauty of our state.

However, as the years went on and as I grew older, I became increasingly aware of the fact that my job on the farm did not have the same protections others did in jobs outside of the agricultural sector. I didn't make the minimum wage, we didn't have overtime protections, and so on. I also increasingly became aware of the fact that I held significantly more privilege than the migrant workers I had been working beside for five years. My friends and I left the farm mid-afternoon, but the migrant workers worked until sunset. I could go home at night and leave at a reasonable time, and these workers lived on the farm.

I have spent the past year working on a research project at the University of Southern Maine on food service workers. In my research, one fact is repeated over and over again: workers in our food chain were, and continue to be, excluded from labor protections for racial reasons. In 1938, the Fair Standards Labor Act instituted federal protections that created many of the standards we know for work today, such as the minimum wage, overtime protections, and child labor protections. However, the revolutionary moment in America's history for white workers excluded black workers from protection¹. Post-Emancipation, formerly enslaved Black workers took jobs in specific industries, disproportionately in agricultural, domestic, and service work². Most jobs in these industries were sharecroppers, tenant farmers, domestic servants, railroad porters, barbers, or as servers in restaurants³. These sectors were intentionally excluded from wage and hour laws and collective bargaining rights to uphold white supremacy and the exploitation of Black labor. While white workers were brought into a new era of economic security, Black workers were excluded.

Today, the legacy of exclusion lives on. Farmworkers today are disproportionately migrant workers, making up almost 70% of the agricultural workforce⁴. Agricultural work is one of the lowest paid industries, suffer the most dangerous conditions, and are extremely vulnerable due to the lack of legal protections and immigration status⁵. We can no longer turn a blind eye towards these injustices. It is time for the state of Maine to make value and protect *all* workers. For these reasons, I am testifying in support of LD 525.

¹<https://www.congress.gov/117/meeting/house/112535/witnesses/HHRG-117-ED10-Wstate-DixonR-20210503.pdf>

²<https://lawcommons.luc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1150&context=facpubs>

³<https://time.com/5404475/history-tipping-american-restaurants-civil-war/>

⁴<https://www.farmworkerjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/NAWS-data-fact-sheet-FINAL.docx-3.pdf>

⁵<https://www.epi.org/blog/the-farmworker-wage-gap-continued-in-2020-farmworkers-and-h-2a-workers-earned-very-low-wages-during-the-pandemic-even-compared-with-other-low-wage-workers/>