



April 26th, 2023

Senator Tipping
Representative Roeder
Members of the Committee on Labor and Housing

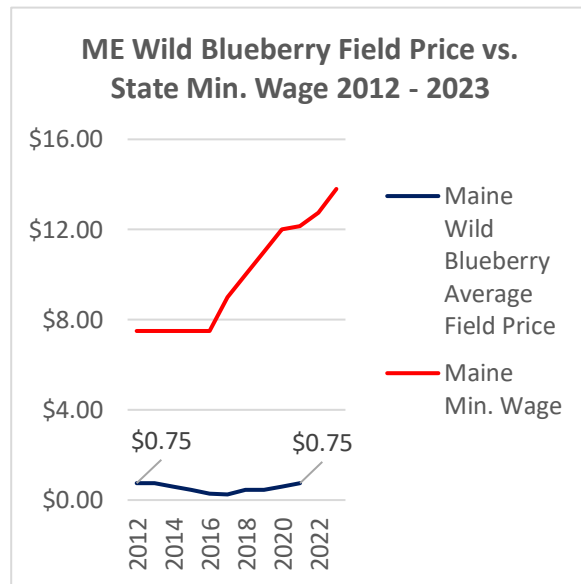
RE: Testifying in Opposition, LD 1376, An Act to Create a Livable Wage by Increasing the Minimum Hourly Wage

My name is Eric Venturini, and I am the Executive Director of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine.

The Wild Blueberry Commission works on behalf of 485¹ wild blueberry farmers and businesses who grow wild blueberries on approximately 42,000² acres across the state and Passamaquoddy lands. Maine's growers often produce crops exceeding 100 million pounds and supply markets in Maine to California, and across the globe.

Labor challenges have been on the top of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine's priority list since 2022, and in a series of three grower listening sessions that we hosted across the State last year, producers consistently ranked "Addressing Labor Challenges," as their top priority.

The Wild Blueberry Commission had not testified against minimum wage bills before this Committee this session. That is because in our industry, farmers are already paying market rates for starting wages, which are typically \$15 to \$20 per hour. Conversations about State minimum wages are, therefore, often irrelevant. However, this bill would increase minimum wage far too quickly for the market to bear. By 2034, this bill would have the



Maine Wild Blueberry farm gate data from USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service.

¹ National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2017. Berries: 2017.

[https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1, Chapter_2_County_Level/Maine/st23_2_003_3_0033.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_2_County_Level/Maine/st23_2_003_3_0033.pdf)

² Based on 2021 harvested acreage (appx. half of total acreage in any given year).

<https://extension.umaine.edu/blueberries/factsheets/statistics-2/crop-production-statistics-2019/>



State minimum wage at \$24 per hour, or 1.75x the \$13.80 that it is today.

In agriculture, the single source of income for most farm businesses is the sale of the crop. In the wild blueberry industry, it's the sale of wild blueberries. Most farmers sell their wild blueberries as a raw product, and as such, are price takers. Referring the graph above, the farm gate price, or the price that producers receive for wild blueberries in 2012 was \$0.75 / pound. The most recently published wild blueberry farm gate price (2021) was also \$0.75 / pound. Can a farmer pay a minimum wage of \$24 / hour at a farm gate price of \$0.75 / pound? No, they cannot.

Farm workers are, under current Maine law subject to the Federal minimum wage, not the State minimum. However, if the State minimum is set at \$24, very few farmers in Maine will be able to hire workers at less than that, even if they are legally allowed to do so.

I urge you to support Maine's small farmers as a vital sector of Maine's economy and vote Ought Not To Pass on this bill. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



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