

**Testimony of Beth White
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

**In Support of LD 372, An Act to Increase Enforcement and Accountability for Wage and Hour
Violations**

And

**LD 2184, Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 9: Rules Governing Administrative Civil
Money Penalties for Labor Law Violations, a Major Substantive Rule of the Department of Labor,
Bureau of Labor Standards**

February 6, 2024, 1pm, Cross Building Room 202 and Electronically

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Beth White, director of politics and legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. The Maine Service Employees Association represents over 13,000 workers across the state in both the public and private sector. We're testifying in support of LD 372 and LD 2184.

Labor violations can take several forms, but one of the most common is wage theft, where an employer withholds wages earned by a worker illegally. First and foremost, this is unfair to workers who have earned their paycheck and deserve to take home every cent they have earned. Additionally, since most Maine businesses play by the rules and do not steal wages from their workers, the businesses who are willing to break the rules and exploit their workers end up having an unfair advantage. Wage theft is harmful to all workers and all honest businesses in our state, but currently, the likelihood of bad actors being caught and facing consequences is limited.

LD 372 would allow the Department of Labor to order employers to remedy these situations, rather than requiring a lawsuit and court proceedings. If the Department of Labor were involved in these cases, it would result in the law being applied more fairly, so that all workers can access justice when mistreated without always requiring a lengthy court process. That being said, we believe it is critically important to ensure that the Department of Labor has the staffing and resources necessary to be able to take on this work.

We also support the intent of LD 2184, which would increase fines and simplify procedures, making it easier to hold businesses who violate labor laws accountable. In addition to accountability, these changes will likely serve as a deterrent to businesses who may be willing to break wage and hour laws because they believe the "benefit" to them will outweigh the consequences they might face.

Thank you for your consideration, and please vote ought to pass on LD 372 and LD 2184.