

Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and Esteemed Members of the Labor and Housing Committee,

My name is Michel Schaab and I live in Monroe, Maine. I am asking you for your support of LD 2273. This bill will address some of the lack of protection for agricultural workers that most other workers enjoy under the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act. It bears stating that the omission of agricultural workers from that act was racially motivated and it has done disproportional harm to people of color and indigenous peoples. You have the ability to help mitigate that harm. I would like you to seriously consider changing one aspect of the bill before you. Section 654 gives the Department of Labor exclusive authority to bring action for unpaid wages on behalf of the employee(s). In other words, they cannot utilize Private Rights of Action groups to investigate and litigate on their behalf. This runs counter to all the other workers in our state who can make use of these groups. It is worth asking yourselves why it would be different for this group of workers. Additionally, the Department of Labor, like most government agencies have stated that they are underfunded and understaffed. It seems that adding an additional unfunded workload to the department would result in many claims not being investigated or investigated long after a claim was initiated.

Thank you for your work and dedication to making Maine a great place for all people to live. Please consider changing section 654 to reflect well on our sense of fairness and equity and vote "ought to pass" to help bring agricultural workers more in line with all working people.

Sincerely,  
Michael Schaab  
Monroe, ME