

Testimony in Support of LD 589

An Act to Make Agricultural Workers and Other Related Workers Employees Under the Wage and Hour Laws

Sponsor: Senator Talbot Ross

Public Hearing: April 2, 2024 10:00 AM

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

My name is Ruben Torres, and I serve as the Advocacy, Communications, and Policy Director for the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC). We represent over 100 organizations across the state, working to ensure that immigrant communities in Maine have the opportunity to thrive. Today, I am here to testify in strong support of LD 589, An Act to Make Agricultural Workers and Other Related Workers Employees Under the Wage and Hour Laws.

Agriculture has long been a cornerstone of Maine's economy and cultural identity. Generations of workers—many of them immigrants—have helped sustain our farms, fisheries, and food systems. However, the success of our agricultural sector has historically depended on a workforce that has been excluded from basic labor protections. LD 589 seeks to address this by ensuring that farmworkers are afforded the same rights as other workers in our state by phasing in overtime pay and extending the state's minimum wage protections to those who labor in the fields, greenhouses, and processing facilities that sustain our food supply.

When workers receive fair wages and are not overburdened by excessive hours, they are more motivated, experience less stress, and are more likely to remain with their employers—contributing to a more stable and resilient agricultural workforce. This is particularly important in Maine, where many farms already struggle with worker retention. By ensuring that farmworkers are fairly compensated, LD 589 supports not only the well-being of these essential workers but also the long-term sustainability of Maine's agricultural industry.

We recognize that transitioning to these new labor standards will require adjustments, which is why this legislation takes a phased approach to implementing overtime pay. This allows both workers and employers to adapt while ensuring that farm labor is valued equitably.

MIRC urges the Committee to support LD 589, recognizing that fair wages and humane working conditions strengthen not just individual farms, but our entire state. Maine has a proud agricultural tradition—one that should be built on fairness, dignity, and economic sustainability for all.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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