

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

In Support of:

- LD 588, An Act to Enact the Agricultural Employees Concerted Activity Protection Act,
Sponsored by Senator Rachel Talbot Ross**
- LD 589, An Act to Make Agricultural Workers and Other Related Workers Employees Under
the Wage and Hour Laws, Sponsored by Senator Rachel Talbot Ross**
- LD 357, An Act to Establish a State Minimum Hourly Wage for Agricultural Workers,
Sponsored by Senator Richard Bennett**

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor,
10am Wednesday, April 2, 2025, Cross Office Building Room 202 and Electronically**

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Committee on Labor, I'm Beth White, director of politics and legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. We are a labor union representing over 13,000 Maine workers. We're here in support of LDs 588, 589, and 357.

Currently farmworkers in Maine are denied basic rights that many of us take for granted:

- They are denied the right to be paid no less than the state minimum wage.
- They are denied the right to receive a pay stub.
- They are denied the right to take unpaid rest breaks.
- They are denied protection from excessive mandatory hours.
- They are denied the right to receive overtime pay.
- They are denied the right to organize and collectively bargain with their employers.
- They are denied the right to engage in concerted activity with coworkers to improve their working conditions.

Fortunately, LDs 588, 589, and 357 provide some solutions by providing farmworkers in Maine the respect and rights they have long been denied. Our union strongly believes that all workers deserve to be respected, protected, and paid fairly for their work, no matter what type of work they do. While we support all three of these bills, we do feel that LD 589 goes further than LD 357 to address the inequities that farmworkers currently face in state statute.

LD 588 would extend to farmworkers workers the right to engage in concerted activity – such as talking with coworkers or employers about wages or working conditions without fear of retaliation.

LD 589 would bring Maine's farmworkers workers up to Maine's minimum hourly wage after nearly 91 years of being excluded from basic economic rights. LD 589 also phases in overtime

pay for farmworkers so that beginning Jan. 1, 2026, overtime would apply only to all hours actually worked in excess of 50 hours in that week; then on Jan. 1, 2027, overtime hours would apply only to all hours actually worked in excess of 45 hours in that week; and finally, on Jan. 1, 2028, overtime would apply to all hours actually worked in excess of 40 hours in that week. This phase-in period would provide more than ample time for employers to plan accordingly to begin bringing farmworkers' wages into the 21st century.

LD 357 would require agricultural workers to be paid the state minimum wage and provides remedies for employees and penalties for employers for unpaid minimum wage violations.

In 2025, Maine's elected officials should be doing everything they can to make sure workers have safe working conditions, fair wages, and protections against employer intimidation in every industry. We sincerely appreciate the work that many of you on this Committee have been doing for years to address this issue; however, for far too long, farmworkers have been excluded from the basic rights and protections that other Maine workers have. Those rights should not cease to exist simply because someone works in one industry rather than another. Our state policies and laws should be updated to do all that we can to protect people from exploitation and mistreatment.

Please do the right thing and support LDs 588, 589, and 357. Thank you and I would be glad to answer any questions.