

Jessica Newton  
Scarborough, Maine  
April 23, 2025

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

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. My name is Jessica Newton and I'm a resident of Scarborough, and I am writing this, primarily, in opposition to LD 952. Although, I am in opposition to all the bills being presented today in regard to changes to Maine's PFML laws: LD406, LD539, LD 1169, LD1221, LD1249, LD1273, LD1307, LD1333, LD1400, and LD 1712.

I moved to Maine 8 years ago after graduating from UMass Amherst with a degree in Sustainable Food & Farming. I was excited to move here and start my career in agriculture. I have been working year-round as the Operations Manager on a farm in Cape Elizabeth, Maine since I moved here in 2017, a job I love dearly and enjoy doing every day. In 2019, I underwent genetic testing after my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and tested positive for BRCA1, a genetic mutation that greatly increases my risk for breast and ovarian cancer. I was immediately filled with fear about how this would affect my future; would I be able to afford the healthcare costs and time off needs for this while keeping my career in agriculture?

Thankfully, when I approached the time for my preventative mastectomy in 2023, the owners of the farm I worked for were able to set up a health insurance plan for year-round employees. Even with a "platinum" level plan through Maine Community Health Options, I still needed to crowd fund through GoFundMe to cover my out-of-pocket costs, physical therapy sessions and **6-weeks of unpaid time off** during my recovery. This amounted to nearly \$15k in costs.

As I look to the future, I worry about other surgeries and procedures that will be necessary due to my BRCA1 diagnosis. Many times, I have deeply considered getting out of the agriculture field or moving back to Massachusetts to pursue a career with better pay and benefits to get by, as a 30-year-old renting in Portland with a substantial amount of college debt. More and more, the agriculture career path is pushing away people like me who love working in this field but simply can not make it work.

When I heard that LD 952 was on the table, I was absolutely infuriated and disheartened to hear that agriculture workers would, **ONCE AGAIN**, be left out. I can't even begin to imagine how I will handle my next few surgeries. It really sends the message that Maine does not care about retaining its agricultural workers, even as the average age of farmers continues to rise. Maine needs to make a statement that a career in agriculture is a viable option for young people, like me, who actively want to farm here as long as they don't have to sacrifice themselves.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee. I urge you to vote “Ought not to Pass” on these bills and show young farmers that they CAN pursue a career in agriculture here in Maine. Thank you!

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