



Testimony of Garrett Mason  
In Support of LD 952

An Act to Exempt Agricultural Employers and Employees from the Maine Paid Family and  
Medical Leave Benefits Program

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor. My name is Garrett Mason. I'm a resident of Lisbon Falls and a partner at Dirigo Public Affairs. I am here on behalf of my client, the Maine Farm Bureau.

We would like to register our support of LD 952, a bill that would exempt agricultural employers and their employees from the newly created Paid Family and Medical Leave Program and directs the Department of Labor to refund contributions already made under this law.

Maine farmers support strong families. However, the realities of farm life make broad mandates like this particularly difficult in agricultural settings. Unlike many industries, farming doesn't stop when someone is absent. Crops still need tending, livestock still need feeding, and there's often no bench of replacement workers.

Farmers are already exempt under the Federal Unemployment Tax Act due to the unique nature of our workforce, which includes many seasonal, family, and part-time workers. The reason for this is because Congress acknowledges and understands that Agriculture operates in a unique and inconsistent environment. However, under PFML here in Maine the same accommodations have not been made. We believe it is consistent and appropriate that Maine adopt an exemption for Agriculture under PFML.

We especially appreciate that this legislation includes retroactive application and refund provisions. Many farmers and their workers have been surprised by payroll deductions and employer contributions that they didn't anticipate or budget for. This bill would allow a refund to avoid any further economic disruption.

LD 952 does not oppose the goals of the Paid Family and Medical Leave Program, it simply recognizes that agriculture must be treated differently because it *is* different.

We urge the Committee to support this legislation to protect the sustainability of our farms and the food security they provide to Maine people.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions.