

Testimony of Ruby Forde
Maine - Committee on Health and Human Services
January 28, 2026

Testimony in Support of LD 2144, “Resolve, to Establish the Working Group to Prioritize Wellness and Mental Health Resources for Heritage Industries”

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, honorable members of the Committee of Health and Human Services, and dedicated staff. I am a Portland resident, a Youth Organizer with JustME for JustUS, an elementary school garden educator – and I am writing to provide testimony in support of LD 2144. I appreciate your time in considering my written testimony, and enacting this bill for the future workers of this great state.

I grew up in Atlanta with little exposure to agriculture or to the people who make their living working the land. That changed when I participated in my high school’s urban agriculture program, where I learned firsthand about growing food and the values of sustainable, small-scale farming. That experience shaped my understanding of food systems and the labor behind them.

After moving to Maine, I began working as an outdoor and garden-based educator, teaching Maine children about local food systems. In this role, I make a point to name and recognize the local farmers and growers who produce our food, helping young people understand the human effort behind feeding our communities.

I believe fully in the transformational power of local food. I also believe that in order for this industry to be healthful, sustainable, and inviting to generations of future farmers, there needs to be a real commitment and focus towards promoting mental health and wellbeing for those who do the important work of feeding our communities.

For the above reasons, I urge you to vote in favor of LD 2144. Thank you again for your time in considering the wellbeing of our farmers, and our collective food future.

Sincerely,
Ruby Forde