

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