



PINE TREE LEGAL ASSISTANCE, INC.

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Greetings. My name is Lawrence Reichard. I live in Belfast; I am a member of the Pine Tree Legal Assistance Board of Directors; and I am here to speak in favor of LD 564. In addition to serving on the Pine Tree Legal Board of Directors, I am also a former paralegal and outreach worker for the Pine Tree Legal Assistance Farmworker Unit. I have spent much of my life working with and indeed living with farmworkers, here in the blueberry barrens of Maine, in the apple orchards of Maine and upstate New York, and in the heavily agricultural Central Valley of California.

In that time, I have learned a few things about farmworkers and their lives. I have learned that they are hardworking people who believe in fair play and a fair day's pay for a hard day's work. But far too often, that is not what they get.

Median farmworker income is only 60% of the national median income. The U.S. Department of Labor lists agriculture as the most "Low Wage High Violation" industry. According to National Farmworker Ministry, less than half of all farmworkers have health insurance and 20% live in poverty. That's almost twice the national poverty rate.

The Housing Assistance Council estimates that at least one-third of farmworkers live in crowded conditions — that's more than six times the rate of crowded homes nationally. Farmworkers also have one of the highest rates of wage theft of any class of workers in the country. Many of them are here on temporary farmworker visas that don't allow them to change employers, a provision that makes them ripe for exploitation and abuse. Many don't speak proficient English, which also makes them much more vulnerable. And many are reluctant to seek legal help because doing so in their home countries often has little upside and can have a very dire downside.

For more than 40 years Pine Tree Legal's Farmworker Unit has been helping Maine's hardworking farmworkers experience real, solid improvements in their lives. And while farmworkers are only one of the many communities and constituencies that receive much-needed help and assistance from Maine's legal services providers, they face a unique set of challenges, and their climb to justice and fair play is often a steep one. And that is why, as a Pine Tree Legal Board member and former farmworker myself, I urge you to pass LD 564 so that Maine's hardworking farmworkers - and all of Maine's hardworking, low-income community - have equal access to the kind of justice many of us take for granted.



Pine Tree Legal Assistance is funded in part by the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). As a condition of the funding received from LSC, PTLA is restricted in certain activities in all of its legal work, including work supported by other funding sources. PTLA may not expend any funds for any activity prohibited by the Legal Services Corporation Act, 42 U.S.C §2996 et. seq. or by Public Law 104-134. Public Law 104—234 §504(d) required that notice of these restrictions be given to all funders of programs funded by LSC. For a copy of these laws or any further information, please contact Nan Heald, Executive Director, Pine Tree Legal Assistance, PO Box 547, Portland, Maine 04112; Tel. 207-774-4753.