



Maine People's Alliance

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing: thank you for the opportunity to testify today in favor of LDs 398 and 525.

My name is Adam Zuckerman and I am here in my role as the Lobbyist for the Maine People's Alliance. MPA is Maine's largest community action organization with over 32,000 members across the state. Our mission is to create a world where everyone has what they need, contributes what they can, and no one is left behind.

MPA strongly supports LDs 398 and 525. We believe that all workers should have the opportunity to organize and should be covered by minimum and overtime wage protections, especially those doing the essential work at the foundation of our food systems.

These bills would address long-standing exemptions that left farmworkers out of labor laws passed in the 1930s. The Fair Labor Standards Act and the National Labor Relations Act, both passed as part of the New Deal, excluded farmworkers as well as domestic workers¹ — groups that are largely comprised of people of color. While farmworkers were made subject to the national minimum wage in the 1960s, they are not guaranteed Maine's higher state minimum wage and don't receive overtime pay. And aside from a period of time from 1997² to 2012³ when DeCoster Egg Farm workers in Maine could unionize, agricultural employees in the state haven't had the right to collectively bargain without retaliation.⁴

The incredibly complex systems of our agriculture sector creates thin margins, especially for our small farmers. But the foundation of the sector should not be based on exempting our agricultural workers from basic minimum standards. Maine should follow in the footsteps of states like Arizona, California, Hawaii, Kansas, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, and Wisconsin that allow farmworkers to collectively bargain.

¹ <http://nfwf.org/farm-workers/farm-worker-issues/labor-laws/>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/07/07/us/maine-egg-farm-workers-win-right-to-join-a-union.html>

³ <https://bangordailynews.com/?p=1067478?ref=relatedBox>

⁴ <https://mainebeacon.com/its-the-right-thing-to-do-bills-would-expand-labor-protections-to-farmworkers-in-maine/>

We should follow in the footsteps of states like Colorado, California, Hawaii, Minnesota, Maryland, New York, Oregon and Washington that grant farmworkers the right to overtime.

The lack of worker protections in agriculture is a direct result of our nation's history of unpaid labor. Addressing that injustice is both a moral issue and an economic issue. When you drive down pay and labor rights for some workers, it hurts us all.

As an MPA employee, I am a proud member of MSEA SEIU Local 1989. When we started our union, canvassers were not initially included. Door-to-door canvassers, like farmworkers, do some of the most important but least appreciated work in our movement, knocking on strangers' doors and having difficult conversations about the issues that face our state. They keep our 32,000 members engaged and get crucial feedback on our work from them. We added them to our union because we recognized that those on the frontlines deserve the same rights and protections as those of us who sit in offices or wear fancy clothes at the State House.

Similarly, our agricultural workers deserve the same labor rights that all have. I strongly urge you to vote Ought to Pass.