

**TESTIMONY BY THE MAINE IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS COALITION
IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 2273: An Act to Establish a State Minimum Hourly Wage for
Agricultural Workers**

Sponsor: Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross
Public Hearing: Tuesday, March 26, 2024, at 01:00 PM

Honorable Members of the Labor and Housing Committee,

The Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC), is a coalition of more than 100 member organizations committed to advancing and defending the rights of immigrants in Maine. Our mission is to improve the legal, social, and economic conditions experienced by Maine's immigrants – enhancing their lives while strengthening Maine – through advocacy, information sharing, and collaboration through and among our member organizations.

We are in support of L.D. 2273 as it would ensure that farmworkers receive the statewide minimum wage, currently set at \$14.15 an hour. Additionally, we support the mandate that employers keep accurate records of hours worked and wages paid, providing much-needed transparency and accountability. When workers are paid a livable wage, they are more motivated, experience less stress, and are more likely to stay with their employers.¹ This increased stability and motivation can lead to higher productivity and overall better outcomes for farms. The benefits of providing a livable minimum wage to farm workers extend beyond economic considerations and have the potential to enhance the efficiency and sustainability of Maine's agricultural sector.

Where this legislation can carry its momentum in the future and help ensure we see an expansion of the aforementioned benefits is through the addition of protections against forced overtime and the inclusion of an optional unpaid ~~break~~ break. We also echo the concerns raised regarding the lack of a private right of action. Without these safeguards, farmworkers remain vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, feeding a system of unequal treatment and undermining the integrity of labor standards.

In conclusion, L.D. 2273 presents an opportunity to improve labor conditions and advance the rights of farmworkers in Maine. While the bill represents progress toward ensuring a livable wage for agricultural laborers, its exemptions and limitations underscore the need for further strengthening to achieve equitable treatment and protection for all workers within the agricultural sector. L.D. 2273 can contribute to a more just and sustainable future for farmworkers and Maine's agricultural industry as a whole.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

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¹ Arindrajit Dube, T. William Lester, and Michael Reich. (2010). "Minimum Wage Effects Across State Borders: Estimates Using Contiguous Counties." IRLE Working Paper No. 157-07.
<http://irle.berkeley.edu/workingpapers/157-07.pdf>