

April 2, 2025  
Committee on Labor  
Maine State Legislature  
Cross Building, Room 202  
Augusta, Maine

Re: *Testimony in Support of LD 589 – An Act to Make Agricultural Workers and Other Related Workers Employees Under the Wage and Hour Laws & LD 357 – An Act to Establish a State Minimum Hourly Wage for Agricultural Workers*

Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Labor,

My name is Natalie Jump, and I am here to testify *in support* of LD 589. As a second-year law student at the University of Maine School of Law, I have spent this academic year researching and writing an article advocating for agricultural workers to receive both Maine's minimum wage rates and overtime compensation.

While LD 357 takes a step in the right direction by ensuring agricultural workers receive Maine minimum wage, it is imperative that we go further to guarantee full protections for agricultural workers, as LD 589 seeks to do. Agricultural workers deserve the same rights as all other employees—rights that should not require special justification. The exclusion of agricultural workers from these protections is especially egregious, given the physically demanding nature of their work and their crucial role in Maine's economy

Agricultural workers are the backbone of agricultural industry. From the fields where they cultivate 10% of the nation's blueberries to the dairy farms that produce 50 million gallons of milk annually, these dedicated individuals are essential to the success of the agricultural industry which contributed a remarkable \$3.6 billion to Maine's economy in 2020. It is the hard work of agricultural workers that makes this possible.

For one summer during college, I worked on a farm in Pennsylvania. It was the most physically challenging experience of my life. I was frequently sunburned, stung by wasps, and often found ticks in my hair at the end of the day. One of my fellow interns even contracted Lyme disease from a tick bite that summer. This all happened in less than three months, so imagine the toll a lifetime of that work can take on your body.

Lastly, I would also like to highlight Title 26, Chapter 7, Subchapter 3, Section 661 of Maine's labor laws, which states: "[i]t is the declared public policy of the State of Maine that workers employed in any occupation should receive wages sufficient to provide adequate maintenance and to protect their health, and to be fairly commensurate with the value of the services

rendered.”<sup>1</sup> However, by excluding agricultural workers from the definition of “employee,” this policy fails to achieve its own stated goals.

Maine cannot fulfill its public policy commitment until agricultural workers are guaranteed the same employment protections as other workers. LD 589 is not a radical bill. It simply places agricultural workers on equal footing with other employees in the state, where they should have been all along. The time has come to ensure agricultural workers receive the rights they have long been denied.

For all the reasons I have outlined today, I respectfully request that you **vote in favor of LD 589**. If not, I urge you to vote in favor of LD 357. Agricultural workers deserve the dignity of fair compensation for their hard and essential work.

Respectfully submitted,

**Natalie Jump**

J.D. Candidate

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<sup>1</sup> Me. Rev. Stat. Ann. tit. 26, § 661 (West, 2023).