

Testimony in Support of LD 588, LD 589:

An Act to Expand Collective Bargaining Rights for Farmworkers

An Act to Make Agricultural Workers and Other Related Workers Employees Under the Wage and Hour Laws

Sponsor: Senator Talbot Ross

Public Hearing: April 2, 2024 10:00 AM

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and esteemed members of the Committee on Labor,

My name is Ruben Torres, and I am the Advocacy, Communications, and Policy Manager for the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC). MIRC represents over 100 organizations across the state, working to improve the economic and social standing of immigrants in Maine. I am here today representing our coalition in support of LD 588 and LD 589.

Together, these bills address long-standing gaps in labor law that have left farmworkers—who are essential to our economy—without the same rights and protections afforded to other workers in our state.

Maine's farmworkers work long hours, often in grueling conditions, yet many do not receive the minimum wage or overtime pay that other workers are awarded. LD 589 would fix this by ensuring that farmworkers earn at least the state minimum wage and by phasing in overtime pay in a responsible way that supports both workers and employers. Retaining a strong and experienced workforce is a shared priority for both farm owners and workers, and ensuring fair wages is part of that equation. We know that when workers have economic stability, they are more likely to remain in their roles, reducing turnover and contributing to a more resilient agricultural sector.

LD 588 recognizes the importance of communication and collaboration in the workplace. This bill would ensure that farmworkers, like other workers in the state, have the ability to advocate for better working conditions and safety standards without fear of retaliation.

At its core, this is about ensuring that agricultural work remains a sustainable career path. Maine farmers and farmworkers share a common goal: a thriving agricultural economy. We strengthen the entire industry by creating an environment where workers can voice concerns and seek solutions collaboratively.

Maine has a rich and proud agricultural history; farm work has always been a cornerstone of our state's economy. Generations of Mainers have worked in agriculture, and we should ensure that the people who continue this tradition today—whether in blueberry fields, dairy farms, or seafood processing—have the opportunity to make a stable and sustainable living in this field.

We ask this committee vote in favor of these bills that would extend a minimum wage and ~~collective bargaining~~ for farmworkers. Thank you for your consideration.

CONCERNED AGRICULTURE PROTECTORS

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