



Testimony of Garrett Mason
in Opposition to LD 357, 588, 589

Good Morning Sen. Tipping, Rep. Roeder, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor. My name is Garrett Mason, I am a resident of Lisbon Falls and a partner with Dirigo Public Affairs. I am here today representing my client, the Maine Farm Bureau. I'm here to oppose LD 357, LD 588, and LD 589. Our Legislative Committee strongly believes these bills undermine the thoughtful balance struck by Governor Mills' Agricultural Workers Minimum Wage Committee held in conjunction with multiple stakeholders during the later half of 2023. As these bills deal with a wide range of issues impacting our industry, I will do my best to point out the subject matters of most concern.

First, we oppose moving agricultural workers into the general wage and hour laws as proposed in LD 589. Agriculture is unique—weather-dependent, seasonal, and tied to perishable goods and livestock welfare. The Committee's report, issued in February 2024, recognized this, recommending a standalone subchapter to address farmworkers' wages without entangling them in broader wage and hour laws that don't fit our sector. LD 589's one-size-fits-all framework risks unintended consequences, like mandatory overtime limits that could cripple farms during critical planting or harvest seasons.

We oppose the private right of action for employees in LD 357 and LD 588. The Governor's Working Group report showed most farmworkers already earn above minimum wage. A private right of action would certainly invite costly litigation, burdening and likely ending small family farms. This would drive up costs, threaten viability, and strain employer-employee relationships, all without clear evidence of widespread wage issues.

Finally, we reject the concerted activity protections in LD 588. While we value farmworkers' voices, these provisions—allowing public complaints and third-party conferencing—would disrupt the cooperative, trust-based culture of Maine farms. The Governors Working Group report didn't prioritize this, and farmers have proven that wage fairness can be achieved without it. Such protections, borrowed from industrial models, don't suit agriculture's collaborative reality and could escalate tensions rather than resolve them.

Agriculture in Maine faces natural and economic hurdles. The large majority of our farmers make their living in spite of them and do it because it's in their blood and a labor of love. To be clear, Maine is by and large not an industrial farming State. According to the 2022 US Census of Agriculture over 75% of Maine farms produced less than \$25,000 in product



annually. The approach taken in all of these bills will undoubtedly make life harder for Maine farmers, result in less Maine food on your plate, and drive up costs for the farmer, their employees, and you.

The Maine Farm Bureau worked in good faith on a farm labor solution that was agreed to in February 2024. While we did not agree with everything in the report, any farmer will tell you that all we have in this life is our word - and we intend to keep it. We remain committed to that agreement and will work to support the elements reflected in it. These bills fail to meet that standard.

We respectfully request this committee reject these three measures. Thank you for your time and consideration.