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MEJ Testimony in Support of LD 357, An Act to Establish a State Minimum Hourly Wage for Agricultural Workers, LD 588, An Act to Enact the Agricultural Employees Concerted Activity Protection Act, LD 589, An Act to Make Agricultural Workers and Other Related Worker Employees Under the Wage and hour Laws

April 2, 2025

Good morning, Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and members of the Labor Committee. My name is Dina Malual, I use she/her pronouns, and I'm a Policy Advocate with Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. I am testifying in support of LDs 357, 588 and 589.

Farmworkers are vital to both the U.S. and Maine economy. These essential workers provide an important service and, like all employees, deserve fair compensation and safe work environments.

Just last year, this very committee heard from myriad advocates, lawmakers, farmers and farmworkers who have all called for safer work environments and higher pay for agricultural workers. The fight for fair compensation is not new. Since 2021, the legislature has passed farmworker-specific bills that extended collective bargaining, protected concerted activity and dealt with minimum and hourly wage compensation. Unfortunately, all four bills were vetoed by Governor Mills.

The three bills presented today are a chance for us to correct past mistakes and do right by farmworkers. LD 588 aims to correct disparities that have existed for more than a century and moves toward a fair and equitable work environment for farmworkers. Because farmworkers continue to be excluded from basic work protections, this bill provides them security. LD 588 promotes safe work environments that farmworkers are often not afforded.

It is imperative that we work together to ensure *all* Maine workers earn equitable compensation. LDs 357 and 589 would ensure that farmworkers earn our statewide

minimum wage, in addition to ensuring stronger requirements around recordkeeping provisions.

While we may not have been responsible for the exploitation of farmworkers in the past, if we do not support policies that correct inequities, we are continuing to make it harder for these workers to exist in today's economy.

We are proud to see the continued effort of supporting farmworkers. The goal is to appropriately compensate a group that is at the forefront of our food supply chain. It is imperative that we work together to ensure *all* workers earn enough money to live and feel safe at their workplace. For these reasons, we urge you to support LDs 357, 588 and 589.

Thank you for your consideration.