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Senator, District 17

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

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Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony in Support of LD 952
“An Act to Exempt Agricultural Employers and Employees from the Maine
Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program”
Joint Standing Committee on Labor

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor:

My name is Jeff Timberlake, and I am a farmer and Senator of District 17. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of LD 952, “An Act to Exempt Agricultural Employers and Employees from the Maine Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program.”

I believe the goals of this program are rooted in good intentions. However, as someone who lives and works in agriculture every day, I can tell you that the structure of this program does not fit the reality of farming in Maine. Agriculture is not a typical business—it’s a way of life, and one that doesn’t pause for paid leave policies designed with office jobs or large businesses in mind.

Farming is seasonal, unpredictable, and very dependent on labor that is already hard to find. We don’t have extra hands waiting in the wings. When a team member is out, the rest of us have to pick up the slack—and in most cases, there simply isn’t anyone else available who can safely or effectively step in. There is no substitute for experience on a working farm.

This program already imposes new financial burdens that many farms simply cannot absorb. Our margins are already tight. Even small required contributions from both employer and employee can have a disproportionate impact on small agricultural operations. For some, this may be the final straw that makes it impossible to keep going.

Moreover, farmers already provide flexibility when it’s needed. We understand that life happens—illness, family emergencies, personal hardship—and we do what we can to support our workers. But a statewide mandate ignores the tight-knit, community-driven relationships that are already in place on many farms. It removes our ability to manage things in a way that makes sense for our operations, our workers, and our livelihoods.

Agriculture cannot be treated like every other industry. Our schedules revolve around the weather, the animals, the growing season—not a calendar or a clock. The one-size-fits-all approach of the Paid Family and Medical Leave program simply doesn’t work for farms, and without an exemption, it could harm the very people it’s meant to help.

Passing LD 952 would be a recognition that Maine's farmers and farmworkers operate under different conditions and deserve different consideration. I urge you to support this bill and help ensure that Maine farms can continue to operate, employ local workers, and contribute to our state's food security and economy.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.