



Testimony in Support of LD 589: An Act to Make Agricultural Workers and Other Related Workers Employees Under the Wage and Hour Laws

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

The Somali Bantu Community Association (SBCA) would like to express our support for LD 589 - An Act to Make Agricultural Workers and Other Related Workers Employees Under the Wage and Hour Laws. SBCA believes that Maine's hard working farmers deserve the same rights as all other employees, including minimum wage and overtime pay.

SBCA provides vital transitional services, advocacy, and access to land and resources for food production that empowers members of the refugee community to uphold cultural identity and economic well-being to thrive in their life here in Maine. One of our major programs is Liberation Farms, a community farming program that gives over 200 refugee farmers access to, and culturally appropriate resources for, the means of sustainable food production for themselves, their families, and their communities. Many community members currently or have previously worked on farms across central and southern Maine. As skilled farmers, the Somali Bantu community - as well as all communities in Maine - deserve fair pay and worker rights.

The exclusion of farmworkers from basic rights such as minimum wage and fair overtime pay stems from policies meant to exclude certain workers, typically people of color and immigrants. The Somali Bantu community understands the racism ingrained in agricultural labor. Bantus endured centuries of oppression in Somalia as agricultural laborers, as recent as the mid-1900s. Policies that do not afford farmworkers equal pay rights continue the historic oppression within the farming sector in the United States and across the world.

At Liberation Farms, we understand the importance of farming, not only as income for producers, but also because farmers feed our communities throughout Maine. Agricultural laborers work hard to put food on the table for Mainers and should be compensated and treated fairly. When Maine farmworkers and their families thrive, Maine's food system and economy

does as well. The Somali Bantu Community Association urges you to support LD 589 and end the exclusion of farmworkers from basic labor protections.