

Testimony in Support of LD 588:

An Act to Expand Collective Bargaining Rights for Farmworkers

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, An Act to Expand Collective Bargaining Rights for Farmworkers.

LD 588 would extend collective bargaining rights to farm workers, granting them the same ability to negotiate for fair wages and working conditions that other workers in Maine already have.

Maine's agricultural industry is vital to our state's economy, and farmworkers are at the heart of that industry. Despite their essential contributions, these workers have long been excluded from labor protections afforded to others. The ability to engage in concerted activity—to advocate for fair pay, safe conditions, and reasonable hours—is a fundamental right that strengthens workplaces, ensures stability in our agricultural sector, and supports Maine's economy as a whole.

Fair wages and safe working conditions are not just moral imperatives—they are practical necessities. When farmworkers are treated equitably, they are more likely to remain in their jobs, reducing turnover and fostering a more stable workforce. This benefits not just the workers themselves, but also farm owners and Maine's agricultural economy by ensuring a reliable, experienced labor force.

LD 588 is not about imposing burdensome regulations—it is about ensuring that farmworkers, like all other workers in Maine, have the ability to advocate for their own well-being. It is about recognizing the dignity of work and ensuring that those who sustain our food systems are not left without a voice in their own workplaces.

We urge the committee to pass LD 588 and ensure that Maine farmworkers receive the same fundamental labor rights as other workers in our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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