



Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing: thank you for the opportunity to testify today in favor of LD 151 and LD 1022.

My name is Cate Blackford and I am here in my role as the Public Policy Director for the Maine People's Alliance. MPA is Maine's largest community action organization with over 32,000 members across the state. Our mission is to create a world where everyone has what they need, contributes what they can, and no one is left behind.

MPA strongly supports LD 151 and LD 1022. We believe that all workers should have the opportunity to organize and should be covered by minimum and overtime wage protections, especially those doing the essential work at the foundation of our food systems.

As recently reported by Beacon, the bills would address long-standing exemptions that left farmworkers out of labor laws passed in the 1930s. The Fair Labor Standards Act and the National Labor Relations Act, both passed as part of the New Deal, excluded farmworkers as well as domestic workers<sup>1</sup> — groups that are largely comprised of people of color. While farmworkers were made subject to the national minimum wage in the 1960s, they are not guaranteed Maine's higher state minimum wage and don't receive overtime pay. And aside from a period of time from 1997<sup>2</sup> to 2012<sup>3</sup> when DeCoster Egg Farm workers in Maine could unionize, agricultural employees in the state haven't had the right to collectively bargain without retaliation.<sup>4</sup>

The incredibly complex systems of our agriculture sector creates razor thin margins, especially for our small farmers. But the foundation of the sector should not be based on exempting our agricultural workers from basic minimum standards. Maine should follow in the footsteps of states like California, where farmworkers have had the ability to unionize since the 1970s, and agricultural workers won the right to overtime pay in 2016<sup>5</sup>, Hawaii, Minnesota, Washington, Maryland and New York where workers are entitled to overtime.<sup>6,7</sup>

The lack of worker protections in agriculture is a direct result of our nation's history of unpaid labor. Addressing that injustice is both a moral issue and an economic issue. As with all

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<sup>1</sup> <http://nfwfm.org/farm-workers/farm-worker-issues/labor-laws/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/07/07/us/maine-egg-farm-workers-win-right-to-join-a-union.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://bangordailynews.com/?p=1067478?ref=relatedBox>

<sup>4</sup> <https://mainebeacon.com/its-the-right-thing-to-do-bills-would-expand-labor-protections-to-farmworkers-in-maine/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/sep/14/california-overtime-farm-workers-union>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.farmworkerjustice.org/hawaii/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://thecounter.org/farm-workers-lack-overtime-pay-systemic-racism/>

workers, when you raise minimum wages, you generate economic growth.<sup>8</sup> These are protections that we can and should offer to our agricultural workers. I strongly urge you to vote Ought to Pass

I am happy to take any questions.

Thank you for your time.

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<sup>8</sup><https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/news/2021/01/27/495163/raising-minimum-wage-boost-economic-recovery-reduce-taxpayer-subsidization-low-wage-work/#:~:text=The%20most%20recent%20analysis%20from,%E2%80%9Capproximately%20100%2C000%20new%20jobs.%E2%80%9D>