

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL KEBEDE, ESQ.

Ought to Pass - LD 1022

**An Act To Make Agricultural Workers and Other  
Workers Employees under the Wage and Hour Laws**

Submitted to the

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
LABOR AND HOUSING

April 7, 2021

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, greetings. My name is Michael Kebede, and I am the Policy Counsel at the ACLU of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil rights and civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. On behalf of our members, we urge you to support LD 1022 because it would help communities of color, and all Maine communities, thrive by fixing a racial inequity in our economy.

Too often in our country's history, communities of color have been left out of improvements in labor, housing, and other systems. The New Deal of the 1930s marked an important step forward for millions of American workers, but not for most communities of color. The Fair Labor Standards Act and the National Labor Relations Act, both parts of the New Deal, excluded farmworkers and domestic workers. The workers in both those groups were disproportionately people of color. This national picture applies to Maine, too; our state, although overwhelmingly white, has frontline workers who are disproportionately people of color. Last summer's astronomical racial disparities in COVID-19 infections are just one outcome of the racial disparities in our state's economy.

If passed, this bill would ensure that agricultural employees and seasonal workers are subject to the laws that place limits on mandatory overtime; that agricultural workers, and certain other workers, receive the same minimum wage and overtime payment rates as workers in other sectors of the economy. All these changes would almost certainly lead to a higher quality of life for the communities of color that sustain some of our vital industries. These changes would advance racial justice while also giving low-wealth and low-income workers the kind of disposable income that will spur growth and prosperity in other sectors of the economy. This bill will create a rising tide that will lift all boats. We urge you to vote *ought to pass*.