

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Lisa Turner, I am the president of the Maine Vegetable and Small Fruit Growers Association, and we are against LD 151.

I have testified on many bills over the years, and while I am merely a private citizen and not a lobbyist, I'm smart enough to realize that when I see a 12-page bill in this state, it's from out-of-state. There are many so-called "model" bills that are promoted by various organizations on both the left and the right side of the aisle, and I've never seen one of them that I've thought was good for Maine, or even relevant.

"Model legislation" seeks to take a problem in another state and assume Maine has the same problem when, as in this case, we rarely do.

If there is a farm that is a problem, we fully support the involvement of the Maine Department of Labor to fix things in accordance with existing law. When things become egregious with one particular farm, we support special legislative action, as was taken in several instances due to a single, large-scale egg producer.

However, the vast majority of Maine farmers do the best they possibly can for their employees, and collective bargaining is more likely to destroy the relationship and good will between the employer and employee than it is to help anything. The way to provide the best possible pay for employees is to provide a robust economy where employers need to compete for employees. No business, farms included, will argue with a good economy.

In this bill, the limit for the number of employees you can have and be subject to collective bargaining is five, which covers many, many farms in Maine. If all those farms were unionized, I think the union organizers who are here to testify today will have made themselves all kinds of new work, which I think be very lucrative for them.

As to the people it is intended to help, I don't see how it does much good for the workers, who may be as likely to find that if faced with unionization, their farmer throws up his hands and sells the farm. We have raised the minimum wage in this state by 50% over 4 years, we have had to upgrade equipment and procedures to meet new federal food safety rules, we had to rapidly adjust to COVID last year and worry about the uncertainties that brought to each of us, and then we had a drought with intermittent deluges. At a certain point, anyone would decide that they've had enough.

We have a hard enough job as it is, we ask that you do not make it impossible; please vote no on this bill.

Lisa Turner
Maine Vegetable and Small Fruit Growers Association

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Lisa Turner, I am the president of the Maine Vegetable and Small Fruit Growers Association, and we are against LD 1022.

The unintended consequences of this bill will negate so many good things that so many of us have been working for over many years.

First, farm workers will make LESS money. Very few farm workers are paid below or even at minimum wage, no matter what the law allows. Most vegetable farms are paying their regular workers \$13 to \$16 per hour this year. NONE of us can afford a 50% increase in that rate, even for a few hours a week. Time and a half on \$15/hour is more than three times the federal minimum wage that many farms throughout the country are paying. We DO compete with pricing for vegetables grown in all states, as well as Mexico. No one can expect a business to be competitive if they have to pay three times as much for labor.

Farming is the only place where a relatively low-skilled person can work more hours and earn more money. Try getting over 40 hours in retail or fast food. Our newest hire is looking forward to a 50-hour work week, as he has done on other farms, and will be very disappointed if he misses out on \$5000 this season because of this bill, and I don't care who you are, that's a lot of money. If you pass this bill, you will be responsible for that young man's loss of income. I don't understand why we would choose to punish those who want to work. Don't think this bill will help farm workers earn more, it will not.

Many farm workers come from other countries or Puerto Rico. They want to work 80 hours a week and send the money home and take the winters off with their families. Working in the U.S. is an incredibly important source of income in many poor countries in the Caribbean and Latin America, and this bill will deprive some very needy people of their livelihoods. Those workers won't come here if they can't work over 40 hours a week because they would not earn enough money to make it worth the time away from their families.

Prices will rise because this wage increase MUST come from consumers, farmers can't make any less money than they already do. Additionally, farmers will be faced with the choice of only growing things that can be machine harvested, as one of our members suggested; or scaling back to solely doing direct marketing, as suggested by another; or getting out of farming all together, as suggested by many. I hear despair in our farmers' voices when we talk about this bill.

Workers will make less and customers will face fewer choices, higher prices, and overall less local product in the market. Given the increased food insecurity due to COVID, this seems like a particularly poor time to enact this bill.

We urge you to vote no on LD 1022.