



Testimony in Support of LD 1453
Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester and members of the Committee,

My name is Eamonn Dundon, and I am the Director of Advocacy at the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce.

I am here today to express our organization's strong support for LD 1453 to codify the state's role in crafting labor standards that will ensure an even playing field for employees and employers around the state.

Much like our testimony several weeks ago in support of LD 455 and LD 774, we are here today to support this commonsense measure that removes the uncertainty of variable labor regulations from municipality to municipality.

In the current local-control environment, imagine a situation where a restaurant worker can look across the bridge into Portland and see another location of their employer where an employee in the same role, with the same amount of experience as them, could be making a effective wage (inclusive of benefits) that is 50% higher, despite living in the same region and paying the same amount for housing, food, and transportation.

This type of regulatory inequity breeds confusion for small businesses and discontent for employees who are rightly indignant when their work is not rewarded with wage and benefits equal to their counterparts separated only by an invisible town line.

The paid sick leave debate over the last couple of years is a perfect example of how municipal labor regulations have the potential for harm, even if unintended. The Portland City Council undertook a robust ordinance drafting processes for paid sick leave. In these discussions it soon ran into hurdles at the Council when became clear that if an ordinance to that effect was passed, Portland would need to establish a municipal department of labor to administer the ordinance and arbitrate complaints, adding FTEs to the budget and duplicating the efforts of the Maine Department of Labor.

Luckily, the state acted, passed a reasonable law, and pre-empted municipalities. Had that not of happened, a municipal paid sick leave ordinance would likely have been put on last fall's ballot with the emergency wage ordinance. In effect, this would have been an unfunded mandate from the voters, and our municipal taxpayers, including seniors of fixed incomes and young homeowners trying to get a foothold in an increasingly competitive market, would have had to foot the bill for the implementation costs of the ordinance. Once created at the state level though, all of the enforcement could be handled by the Maine Department of Labor, who are much more equipped to interpret, enforce, and analyze labor related regulations. It is well past time to expand that narrow band of pre-emption to the entire spectrum of wage and benefit regulation.

For these reasons we ask that you assert the state's role in these policy discussions and remove the inequity and confusion of municipal labor ordinances. Thank you for your time today, and, on behalf of the Portland Regional Chamber I ask that you please support LD 1453.