

Testimony of Jeff McCabe
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

In Support of:

[LD 398, HP0249](#), An Act to Make Agricultural Workers and Other Related Workers Employees Under the Wage and Hour Laws, Sponsored by Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross of Portland

[LD 525, HP0330](#), An Act to Protect Farm Workers by Allowing Them to Organize for the Purposes of Collective Bargaining, Sponsored by Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross of Portland

[LD 1483, SP0604](#), An Act to Protect the Rights of Agricultural Workers, Sponsored by Senator Craig Hickman of Kennebec

April 18, 2023

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Jeff McCabe, Director of Politics and Legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. The Maine Service Employees Association represents over 13,000 workers across the state.

We're here in support of LD 1483, LD 398 and LD 525. We see LD 1483, after talking with Senator Hickman, as a bill that should be codified immediately into state law. We look forward to seeing LD 398 and LD 525 being worked by the committee, the administration and stakeholders, and then being passed and signed into law.

In 2023, Maine's elected officials should be doing everything they can do to make sure workers have safe working conditions, humane housing accommodations and protections against employer intimidation in every industry. Efforts to allow farmworkers the right to organize and join a union to negotiate fair wages, reasonable schedules and working conditions seem reasonable. The right to organize and join a union should be a basic human right.

We understand that some farmers and farm owners may have concerns. We are hopeful the work of the committee can answer questions and concerns. We understand farming is extremely difficult work and we are aware that farming in Maine at times has been challenging financially. I have worked on agricultural issues in the past in my professional capacity and while in elected office. I have seen the Legislature do good bipartisan work to help farmers. With LDs 398, 525 and 1483, I see an opportunity for the Legislature to do important work to support farm workers.

I struggle that in 2023 we are debating farmworkers' fundamental First Amendment right to freedom of association and freedom of assembly. We as an organization believe the right of workers to organize is a fundamental human right that all workers deserve. Those rights should not cease to exist simply because you work in one industry versus another. We also are aware of the history surrounding this issue.

Agriculture in Maine is challenging. Farmers and farmworkers do incredible work as part of Maine's natural-resource-based economy. I understand the opposition and know that many in opposition today are caring people and many are good to the people who work for them. At the same time, we cannot ignore that workers are being exploited and have been exploited in our great state in recent history. Our state policies and laws should be used and updated to do all we can to protect people from exploitation.

I am happy to take any questions. Thank you.