



**Testimony of the
Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations
In Support of LD 525, LD 398, and LD 1483**

“An Act to Protect Farm Workers by Allowing Them to Organize for the Purposes of Collective Bargaining”

“An Act to Make Agricultural Workers and Other Related Workers Employees Under the Wage and Hour Laws”

“An Act to Protect the Rights of Agricultural Workers”

Tuesday, April 18, 2023

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Morgan Pottle Urquhart, I live in Bangor, and I am the Policy and Communications Director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations.

I am honored to offer testimony in support of LDs 525, 398, and 1483, “An Act to Protect Farm Workers by Allowing Them to Organize for the Purposes of Collective Bargaining,” “An Act to Make Agricultural Workers and Other Related Workers Employees Under the Wage and Hour Laws,” and “An Act to Protect the Rights of Agricultural Workers.” We extend deep gratitude to Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross and Senator Craig Hickman for introducing these bills.

No matter who we are, where we come from or the color of our skin, most of us believe that working people deserve fair pay and fair treatment for their work. But today, farmworkers in Maine and across the country lack the basic right to join together to address unfair treatment and unsafe conditions where they exist. This systemic exploitation of farmworkers, who are disproportionately people of color, by a handful of bad actors hurts us all, including our farms.

Agricultural workers in Maine, and in the United States, historically have been excluded from labor laws through racialized exemptions at both the state and federal levels.¹ Currently, agricultural workers are not subject to Maine’s minimum wage, overtime and other worker protection laws, such as the ability to discuss wages and working conditions. Under current Maine law, agricultural workers can legally be fired for making any attempt to improve conditions at their workplace.

¹ Perea, Juan F., The Echoes of Slavery: Recognizing the Racist Origins of the Agricultural and Domestic Worker Exclusion from the National Labor Relations Act. 2011. <https://lawcommons.luc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1150&context=facpubs>.

The exemption of agricultural workers from Maine’s labor laws has a disproportionate negative impact on Mainers of color, particularly Indigenous and Latino/Hispanic people, who are more likely to work in the state’s agricultural sector than the general population.²

Establishing worker protections for farmworkers would improve working conditions for some of the most vulnerable workers in Maine. The Permanent Commission strongly urges the passage of these bills.

² Myall, James, Maine Center for Economic Policy. State of Working Maine. 2020. <https://www.mcecp.org/maines-economy/report-state-of-working-maine-2020/>.