



## Maine Education Association

Grace Leavitt President | Jesse Hargrove Vice President | Beth French Treasurer  
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

### Testimony

#### In Support Of

**LD 372: An Act To Increase Enforcement and Accountability for Wage and Hour Violations**

**LD 2184: Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 9: Rules Governing Administrative Civil Money Penalties for Labor Law Violations, a Major Substantive Rule of the Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Standards**

**Jan Kosinski, Government Relations Director, Maine Education Association**

**Before The Labor and Housing Committee**

**February 6th, 2024**

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and other esteemed members of the Labor and Housing Committee,

My name is Jan Kosinski, and I am here on behalf of the Maine Education Association (MEA) to testify in support of LD 372, *An Act to Increase Enforcement and Accountability for Wage and Hour Violations*, as amended, and LD 2184, *Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 9: Rules Governing Administrative Civil Money Penalties for Labor Law Violations, a Major Substantive Rule of the Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Standards*. The MEA represents 24,000 educators in the state of Maine, including teachers, certified professionals, and support staff in nearly every public school in the state as well as the full-time faculty and other professionals in the University of Maine and Community College systems.

Our state's wage and hour laws are designed to make sure workers get a fair shake. Violations of our wage and hour laws breed mistrust, anger, and frustration for workers. These violations take various forms, including unpaid wages, withheld overtime pay, misclassification of employees as independent contractors. Such practices, while not always intentional, serve to deprive workers of their hard-earned income and erode the trust in the fairness of our state's labor laws.

As a union, we work hard to enforce wage and hour laws for our members and the people we are required to represent. We will often initiate legal action if we encounter a dispute about a wage and hour case that we are not able to quickly resolve. But we realize not all workers have unions and not all working people have the options that we provide to our members and the educators we represent. And that is why we support both bills before you today.

LD 372 proposes to provide the Department of Labor more tools to hold employers accountable when wage and hour violations occur. If the Department has more authority, as called for in this bill, we may reconsider our actions where we rely on private actions to protect our members from wage theft or violations of the wage and hour laws of Maine.

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And LD 2184 proposes to increase the penalties employers may be assessed for violations.

Strengthening penalties for wage and hour violations sends a clear message that exploitation of workers will not be tolerated in our state. By increasing fines, implementing stricter enforcement mechanisms, and providing greater Department of Labor authority in settling disputes, we can create a stronger deterrent against unlawful practices. By taking action, you can help make sure more workers are treated fairly and correctly compensated for their labor.