



Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing: my name is Adam Zuckerman and I am here in my role as the Lobbyist for the Maine People's Alliance. Our 32,000 members stretch from Kittery to Fort Kent.

MPA is in strong support of the approach behind LD 2184. We believe that simplifying procedures, increasing fines, and increased emphasis on proactive enforcement will serve as an effective deterrent, helping to reduce widespread wage and hour violations across our state.

We do appreciate the positive strides that the Bureau has made in recent years, publicly naming labor offenders and increasing labor inspectors from four in 2018 to eight today. However, the department is still woefully understaffed with just one inspector for every 5,500 workplaces in our state. That makes it nearly impossible to enforce our existing labor standards.

Corporations' widespread use of forced arbitration clauses compounds the problem. According to the National Employment Law Project, in 2019 Maine employers who use forced arbitration pocketed over \$40 million owed to Maine workers who earn less than \$13 an hour, the lowest-income workers in our state, effectively preventing these workers from ever recovering their stolen wages.<sup>1</sup>

That includes Waterville truck driver Bob Curtis. When Mr. Curtis and 40 of his co-workers decided to sue their employer, 3rd Party Logistics, for refusing to pay them for all of their time, they learned that was not legally possible. When they were hired, they had all signed individual arbitration waivers and forfeited their right to take the company to court. "I needed to work," Curtis told this committee in 2019, "so I reluctantly had to sign the arbitration agreement."<sup>2</sup>

While these rule changes do not end forced arbitration, they give workers relief. Increased penalties and an emphasis on strategic enforcement will give recourse to some of the most marginalized workers in our state, returning money they earned to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nelp.org/publication/forced-arbitration-helped-employers-who-committed-wage-theft-pocket-40-million-owed-to-maine-workers-in-2019/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://mainebeacon.com/sen-jackson-seeks-to-restore-workers-rights-enforcement-of-maine-labor-laws/>

low-income workers, and making Maine a better place to live and work. I urge you to support LD 2184. Thank you.