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On behalf of working people across the state, I am here to briefly touch on a portion of the VT Pro Act that would strengthen the rights of farm and domestic workers, among other important provisions. We need legislation that ensures agricultural and domestic workers have the right to form a union in Vermont.

Why is this important? When the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) was passed in 1935 it was a landmark piece of legislation because, for the first time, most workers across the country had a legal path to forming a union. Of course, the NLRA still sets the standard for federal labor law, but there are at least two relevant points of context from 1935 that apply to us here today. First, the passage of the NLRA occurred after decades of workers' struggles to organize without legal protection. Second, once passed, the NLRA excluded both agricultural and domestic workers from federal labor law protections. Back then and today, many people doing these types of jobs have been people of color. As a result, farm and domestic workers find themselves without federal protection and with racist employment standards that pre-date the Great Depression.

Fortunately, neighboring states like Massachusetts offer examples of existing laws that further protect farm and domestic workers not covered by the NLRA. Our Local represents workers in Vermont and Massachusetts, where in the latter state agricultural workers already have the right to bargain collectively with their employer. A cultivation worker who I assisted in organizing their workplace later became a union steward and offered me the following reflection, "Before our union they treated cultivation like the problem child who asks for too much when all we wanted was fair

pay and safer working conditions. After our union they are a lot more careful with handling the employees and are more cautious about breaking contract rules that weren't in place before." It's worth mentioning that this member is employed as a cannabis cultivator in an industry that is relatively new to Vermont, but one that will create new farming jobs under the same basic classification that already includes dairy workers and other forms of cultivation.

Since there are currently no organized farm workers in the state of Vermont, I think it's worth pointing out what exactly this provision of the Act is seeking. Agricultural workers start their supply chain, and they want the same protections that non-agricultural workers receive further down the chain. In practice, current regulations around domestic and agricultural workers offer the following situations: "If I make cheese, then I can form a union. If I care for and milk cows, then I can't form a union." The majority of working people in Vermont have access to minimum wage and overtime protections, workers compensation, and unemployment insurance, all of which should be available to farm and domestic workers. Yet, these protections would be incomplete without creating a path for workers to organize and collectively bargain with their employers. Reasonable people can disagree, but most workers can help themselves by organizing a union whether they're faced with an unreasonable employer, or not. Why shouldn't *these* workers have the same chance?

As a member of the Vermont AFL-CIO, I implore the Committee to expand the rights of agricultural and domestic workers by passing the VT Pro Act.