



IMMIGRANT LEGAL ADVOCACY PROJECT

## **ILAP Statement on Labor Trafficking in Maine: Working People Should Be Protected, Not Criminalized**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** April 7, 2023

**CONTACT:** [press@ilapmaine.org](mailto:press@ilapmaine.org)

**PORTLAND, ME --** The U.S. immigration system has few to no options for people who have been forced to leave their homes to find work to survive. In general, our laws do not offer permanent protection to people on the basis of lack of access to food, clean water, medicine or medical care, education, or other basic human needs. To survive and support their families, many people must live and work in the United States without immigration status – including in our communities here in Maine.

The failure of our immigration system to provide opportunities for people in our communities to obtain immigration status leaves them vulnerable to predatory employers and traffickers who seek to exploit them. These employers know that people without permanent immigration status are often at risk of deportation to life-threatening conditions and of having their families torn apart. This translates to working people being subjected to illegal, unsafe and inhumane work conditions; wage theft; exhaustive long hours; and other harm, including injuries and even death.

Working people in exploitative situations should be protected, not criminalized. When we punish those who are trying to survive, raise their families, and live a better life, we all lose. When we create opportunities for workers to safely come forward and report traffickers, we build safer communities for all of us.

In 2022, in response to years of organizing and activism by migrant workers and immigrants' rights organizations, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued [new guidance](#) and a process for workers who assist in investigations against these predatory employers. This expanded protection recognizes the harm these employers do to individuals, families, and whole communities. ILAP calls on Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Maine and beyond to ensure exploited workers are able to access attorneys and avail themselves of this and other protections.

ILAP stands with migrant workers in Maine and beyond. As we continue to provide legal services and community education, we call on Congress to create pathways to citizenship for the millions of human beings who call this country home and work hard every day but are stuck in needless and dangerous limbo.

**Individuals in Maine seeking immigration legal help can reach ILAP at:**  
<https://ilapmaine.org/get-legal-help>.