



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Susan Serino

## SERINO: SHAME ON SUPERMAJORITY FOR FAILING TO SUPPORT EFFORT TO SAVE NEW YORK FARMS

SUSAN SERINO March 9, 2022

| ISSUE: **FARM WAGE BOARD**

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ALBANY, NY—The New York State Senate today passed a number of bills co-sponsored by Senator Serino aimed at bolstering agriculture in the state, however when given the opportunity to advance an amendment that would remove power from the unelected Farm Laborers Wage Board—a move that would actually prevent a looming farm workforce shortage—the Senate’s Supermajority rejected the commonsense amendment outright.

*“I was proud to support a number of bills today that will provide critical services to New York’s farmers,” said Senator Serino. “However, the single most important thing we can do to support the future of farming in the state is to abolish the Wage Board and prevent the lowering of the overtime threshold. It is time for Albany to hear the voices of farmers and farmworkers and do whatever we can to combat these proposed changes to ensure that our farmers can continue doing what they do best—nourishing New York. To have rejected the opportunity to make a real difference for our farmers today is shameful.”*

Senator Serino voted against the passage of the bill that has become known as the Farm Labor Act that was passed in 2019. Since that time, New York’s farmers have anxiously awaited **the recommendation** of the Farm Laborers Wage Board’s decision on lowering the 60-hour overtime threshold. While the decision was postponed in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Wage Board ultimately ignored the overwhelming testimony in opposition and recommended to lower the threshold to 40 hours in January 2022.

During the recent slate of State Budget Hearings, Senator Serino questioned DOL Commissioner Roberta Reardon as to whether she planned to approve the recommendation. The Commissioner at the time had not yet received the Wage Board’s report and would not comment on her recommendation.

A state commissioned study by Cornell recently found that half of the fruit and vegetable farms surveyed noted they would scale back their operations or leave the industry altogether if a 40-hour threshold is enacted, two-thirds of dairy farms interviewed indicated they would move out of milk production, direct future investments out of state or outside of dairy, or abandon agriculture entirely, and a large majority of guest workers themselves said they would consider going to another state if the threshold was lowered.

*“Farming is simply not a 9-5 job,” said Senator Serino. “It is time for the Legislature’s Supermajority to govern by listening to the people these rule changes would impact and stop bending to the will of out-of-touch politicians who have no real understanding of the challenges our farmers and farmworkers face every day.”*

The bills passed today that were co-sponsored by Senator Sue Serino include measures to expand the eligibility for the young farmers loan forgiveness incentive program, increase the amount of the farm workforce retention credit, and create a Cornell Cooperative Extension one-stop farming hotline.