

Statement of The Hon. Marge L Kilkelly

Maine Compensation Commission

November 7, 2019

Thank you members of the Commission, it is a pleasure for me to be here today. My name is Marge Kilkelly I live in Dresden. I was honored to serve in the Legislature representing Lincoln County for 16 years- 1986-2002 10 in the House- then Term Limits- so I ran for the Senate after 3 terms I left because I really dislike term limits and decided to leave on my own terms. It is/was the best job in the world...

I then worked for the Council of State Governments for 10 years- 7 of those working on rural economic development and agriculture issues and three and a half serving as Deputy Director based in NYC. We covered the 11 northeast states, 6 Canadian provinces and USVI and Puerto Rico. I thoroughly enjoyed spending so much time in other legislative and provincial bodies learning and understanding how they operate and the benefits and challenges of systems, policies and procedures. I truly value Public Service and respect the people who choose to serve- I love government, governance and governing.

I then became Policy Director for the 2012 King for Senate Campaign and then off to DC- on deployment- to serve as Senior Policy Advisor on a variety of issues. This year it was time for this Maine girl to get back home-I am now employed as the Policy Manager at the Maine Primary Care Assoc. I am here today on my own time speaking for myself.

I spoke at a similar hearing years ago as a member and supported a raise to minimum wage for legislators- the headline the next morning read legislators want 100% pay increase.

When I think of Legislative pay, I am immediately transported to a dark and stormy night, long, long ago. I was getting home from work, late. My mother and three kids had been answering the phone nonstop since they had gotten home from school and a frustrated kid pulled the door out of my hand just as I reached for it...

"When are you going to get a real job? You are the only person I know who has a job where you have to pay money to get it, pay money to keep it and they don't pay you to do it! Almost 30 years later, I still don't have a great answer to that question- other than I loved it.. If I have one regret about my legislative service it is that my kids went without things they might have had.

In 1985 the year before I ran the minimum wage was \$3.45 an hour (\$7176.00) My legislative pay was about \$7500 a year- as a single parent I was the Household income and had two other jobs that I moved in and out of as the Session demanded.

Today the minimum wage is about 4 times higher than in 1986 as it climbs to \$15.00 (\$31,200) and according to the Legislative Handbook for this term, the legislative salary is an average of \$12,000 (\$14,271 and \$10,157) or about 1½ times higher than 1986.

I do not know of any cost that has stagnated to that point.

Why is it that we seem to almost take pride in keeping lawmaker salaries so low? What do Maine and its citizens gain from low pay for lawmakers? Well, one thing is being able to still claim the title Citizen Legislature. Both NCSL and Wikipedia describe a Citizen Legislature....

as a legislative chamber made up primarily of citizens who have a full-time occupation besides being a legislator. Such citizen legislatures can be found on the state level, as in some U.S. states, or on the national level as in Switzerland.

I don't disagree with that, as far as it goes, however, I think it really misses a critical point. When I think of a gathering of citizens I think of people who represent as many groups as possible- like a town meeting- young, old, older, well to do, hourly workers, business owner, retired, single, married, born Mainers and newcomers. People who work the land and the sea, wait tables, create amazing art or are doctors, nurses, designers, builders and plumbers.

One of my biggest concerns is that as pay stagnates and loses ground there will be less and less opportunity for that diversity to be represented in the legislature.

I believe strongly, that speaking as a member, on the floor, or in committee, in the first person about how legislation would impact you, your business, or your community is the best way to create solid public policy. (I am still an Optimist)-

When I spoke on the Floor as a single parent, a person who had been on assistance programs and had - with the help of many others- pulled myself up- I hope that made some other members see

a different side of those issues than they might have had in their own experience - and in that way impacted those decisions.

All of the effort around Clean Elections was to level the playing field and assure that more people could run for office- well running for office means also serving in office and if you can't afford to serve what has been accomplished?

If public service is to be limited to the folks who can afford to serve - how does that really sustain a citizen legislature? For the time a person needs to spend -reasonably- on state business there ought to be compensation that makes up the difference. There ought to be a reasonable fiscal fluidity between the outside job and the demands of the policy making. What I am suggesting is not creating a high paid position- but a 'safety net' that provides an opportunity to serve and do the job.

When I was running for the Senate, one night late my mother asked me if I won would I get more money- no I said. Would I get more staff help- not much I responded. Well, what would you get- 3 times more constituents was the reply.

Call it part time – if you want- but the Legislature is full time work for part time pay.

Long Session – 22 weeks of work- conservatively at 40 hours a week= 1440 hours / \$14,000
= \$9.91 hour.

Short Session – 14 weeks of work-conservatively 40 hours a week=880 hours/\$10,157=
\$11.54

And of course, that does not include nights and weekend town and community group meetings, constituent meetings at home or in Augusta, the three hour walks through the grocery store or even the Sunday extra hour after church to talk about this or that.

One of my earliest calls was from Dave- we talked a great deal- he called one morning at 5:30 am – I rolled over and picked up the phone assuming it was a crisis somewhere- hi this is Dave- I said Dave its 5:30 in the morning- I know he said, I have to go into work early!

One August afternoon, as I sat at my desk in my house- I wrote a response to an angry constituent who could not believe that I had voted to raise my pay and needed over \$100,000 a year. I carefully explained that I had not received any pay since April and only if I won would I get a check in January...but now it was August, and I was happy to respond to him on my unpaid time.

I was lobbied on a bill at my favorite uncle's funeral and challenged about parking spaces at the State Library during an ER visit where I could not talk- that was really unfair.

Being a Maine legislator is about passing bills- but even more it is serving as an Ombudsman to state government for the people you serve. That is not on a Session Calendar. People do not, and in many cases cannot wait to have their issues resolved or heard by their legislator until the Session begins- while that is so obvious to us it is not as obvious even to the folks who write the letters in August or call at 5:30 am.

I urge you to find a better way than we have used before to convey that time commitment as you make your recommendations.

Legislators need fair pay, not high pay. They need to be able to do the work that supports their families and the work for the People of Maine without their families needing to be unduly stressed and pressured by the financial issues.

If we are serious and proud of maintaining a real Citizen Legislature then there must be adequate compensation to allow a variety of citizens to serve.

Maine is a frugal state. That is not a bad thing at all. Because what comes with that frugality is a reasonableness and fairness- when folks see and understand the facts. Facts and explanations today have a difficult time being heard through the chatter.

As you go through your deliberations, I would urge you to consider developing a model that is based on hours of service, both session time and a factor for non-session time, in order to convey to the public, as clearly as possible, how the compensation model is designed to be fair and not extravagant.

Thank you for your time. I would be pleased to answer any questions.