

Testimony of Dean Staffieri  
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989

In Support of LD 258, "An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025" (Emergency)  
(Governor's Bill)  
Sponsored by Representative Melanie Sachs

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs,  
Friday, February 10, 2023, State House Room 228, and Electronically

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, I'm Dean Staffieri, President of the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. The Maine Service Employees Association represents over 13,000 workers across the state, including but not limited to workers in all three branches of Maine State Government, the Maine Community College System, Maine Maritime Academy and Child Development Services, the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing/Governor Baxter School for the Deaf, as well as public workers for the City of Lewiston, Lewiston Schools, City of Auburn and York County Government.

Members of our union are encouraged by many initiatives impacting them in the Governor's proposed state budget. It continues free community college for another two years. It increases funding for both the Judicial Branch and Maine Maritime Academy. It reduces the state employee share of individual health insurance premiums by establishing new premium tiers and also adjusts the health credit premium program to reflect those income tiers. It fully funds municipal revenue sharing.

In her remarks at a news conference on January 10 about the proposed budget, Governor Mills said, "We must invest in the infrastructure that supports our greatest asset, which is our people." We wholeheartedly agree on the need for this kind of investment in this budget.

The proposed budget counts on a qualified and experienced state workforce to provide services to all Maine people, yet throughout all departments of Maine State Government, state workers are continuously overwhelmed and understaffed in delivering the quality services Maine people count on. Several members of our union recently have shared their experiences to draw attention to the State's public employee recruitment and retention problems.

- MSEA-SEIU Member Brian Markey, an assistant technician at Maine DOT, said that in his former position as a transportation worker, he once plowed continuously for 42-and-a-half hours straight, during the bomb cyclone of February 2017. He said, "You see double-vision, triple-vision, when you get that tired."

- MSEA-SEIU Member Brocke Robinson, who works as an emergency communications specialist for the Maine Department of Public Safety, said that because of understaffing, “Instead of working eight- or 10-hour shifts, most of the time I’m working 14 or 16 hours, a lot of the times with eight hours off, and then we return to work another 14- or 16-hour shift. It can be exhausting. If you’re tired, the chance of making a mistake, or making a wrong judgment call, is higher. We pray that that’s never the outcome but that’s the reality of the situation.”

Brocke Robinson also had this to say: “We need to step in now, and get the funding that we need now before we get to the point where everybody in the general public is gonna notice that there’s a shortage.”

The stories of Brian and Brocke are not isolated. Rather, they are just two examples of the impact of the State of Maine consistently underfunding and understaffing the services Maine people count on.

A recent market pay study commissioned by the State shows workers in the Executive Branch have fallen significantly behind other public sector and private sector workers in compensation. In 2020, the Mills administration released [the State of Maine Market Study Report](#) comparing the wages of State workers to their public and private sector counterparts throughout New England. The findings confirm what we’ve been telling the public and lawmakers for years and what a similar study found back in January of 2009: The State continues to substantially underpay state workers for the work they do. Immediate action and progress are needed to address this longstanding injustice.

The study used a sample of 100 “benchmark” job classifications to determine the overall competitiveness of the Executive Branch. According to the report, “The State’s base pay is consistently below the market average at the pay range minimum, midpoint, and maximum. Of the 100 benchmark job titles, 63 benchmark titles are below the market average; 14 benchmark titles are competitive with the market average; 5 benchmark titles are above the market average; 18 benchmark job titles do not have sufficient market data to make a comparison.

According to the report, MSEA-SEIU-represented positions in the State of Maine Executive Branch earn less than their counterparts as follows:

- **Administrative Services Bargaining Unit:** Workers earn 82% compared to their counterparts;
- **Operations, Maintenance and Support Services Bargaining Unit:** Workers earn 82% compared to their counterparts;
- **Professional-Technical Services Bargaining Unit:** Workers earn 86% compared to their counterparts;

- **Supervisory Services Bargaining Unit:** Workers earn 84% compared to their counterparts.

You should know that members of MSEA-SEIU Local 1989 are currently in contract negotiations with the Mills administration for new Executive Branch contracts and we are determined to use the report's findings to advocate for ending the state employee pay gap. We look forward to working with this committee and the entire 131<sup>st</sup> Maine Legislature in support of ending the pay gap and continuing our advocacy for state workers and the services they provide.

While we are encouraged by many of the initiatives in the proposed State and Supplemental budgets, more must be done. Please continue addressing the need to make retired state workers and retired state teachers whole from the pension cuts of 2011. We're asking this Legislature and administration to fully fund a retiree cost of living adjustment (COLA) that matches inflation for participants in the Maine Public Employees Retirement System.

Our members look forward to working with all of you to ensure a State budget that funds quality services and treats fairly the workers who provide them and the retirees who have dedicated their careers to public service in our Great State of Maine. As you craft this budget, please take to heart the Governor's words from Jan. 10: "Our greatest asset....is our people."

Thank you and I would be glad to answer any questions.