

Senator Rotundo, Senator Tipping, Representative Sachs, Representative Roeder and Members of the Committees of Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Labor and Housing

My name is Winifred Malia. I am a Principal Economic Research Analyst; I have worked for the Maine Dept of Labor for over 35 years and I am the current Chapter President of the Eichel-Crinion Chapter of the Maine Service Employee Association. I am submitting this testimony on my own time concerning 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 Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 20, 2024 and June 30, 2025.

As you know, the Dept of Labor provides vital services for the State of Maine such as employment and training services for workers and employers, workplace safety training, wage and hour standards, services for the blind & visually impaired, deaf, hard of hearing & late deafened, and vocational rehabilitation, labor market information, and economic stability from the unemployment benefits while workers find reemployment. In order to provide these services, the Dept of Labor needs to be able to fully staff the positions. Retention and recruitment is made more difficult as the pay gap widens without any meaningful progress to close it.

The pay gap is causing positions to remain vacant or employees to accept positions elsewhere. There are regular job postings for rehabilitation counselor, career center consultants, occupational safety specialist, and customer service representatives to name a few because qualified individuals are not applying due to the low wages. There are numerous employees that have or will be retiring in the next few years. These positions need to be filled with qualified individuals and that will only happen if wages are competitive.

I am asking that you support the workers of the Dept of Labor that serve the citizens of the State of Maine every day by funding the Department at levels that closes the pay gap.

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