

February 14, 2023

Testimony on LD 258 – the Governor’s Proposed State Budget

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety,

I’m Gary R. Brooks from Dedham and I’m testifying here on my own time as a member of my union, MSEA, and as a private citizen. I work as a Building Custodian for the Maine Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management. I’m here today to tell you that State of Maine workers have been underpaid for years and it’s past time our wages are raised so 1) we can catch up with the rising cost of living and 2) so we are paid fairly compared to everyone else doing similar work throughout New England.

I have 20 years of experience as a custodian. Three other custodians and I clean 20 buildings daily. We cannot live on \$17.54 an hour! The four of us are really hurting. We like are jobs and aren’t going anywhere, but our pay cannot stay flat while everything around us skyrockets out of sight. I should not have to find another job to survive. When I told my State Representative, Micky Carmichael, about our low pay, he asked me: Why is the pay so low and how are you living on half-pay?

Everybody knows we’ve been falling further and further behind, but the State still hasn’t done enough about it. The State two years ago, in 2020, released a report showing State workers are on average paid 15 percent less than their public and private sector counterparts throughout New England. If you haven’t read that report, I think you should read it. It’s online at <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/5615>.

As a Building Custodian, my paycheck is eaten up the cost of living and circumstances beyond my control. We need higher wages. My power bill as a single person has gone up a lot because the PUC raised my kilowatt rate. With a \$820 monthly house payment there’s not much left for everything else, so we custodians at the Guard base, all of us workers, every one of us, need higher wages.

Right now the State has a budget surplus, so I’m asking you to fund a State budget that ends the State Employee Pay Gap. You should also know it’s the low wages for State workers that is making it hard for the State to recruit and retain workers. Funding a State budget that ends the State Employee Pay Gap will go a long way toward making sure the services are there that Maine people count on every day. Thank you.

Gary R. Brooks
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