

Hello, I am writing to you today on my own time with concern regarding rising fuel costs, electricity, and the general cost of living. I currently work for the Maine Department of Transportation out of Presque Isle.

Every day expenses have been rapidly increasing for everyone these days. The burden of increased cost weighs heavily on already significantly underpaid state employees. Some states and special groups have received several forms of payments due to covid issues and increases in living expenses. Several municipal organizations have distributed bonuses for workers who continued to do their jobs during the covid pandemic. To date I have not heard any mention of the governor issuing payments to state employees for their continued service during the covid pandemic. A 4% raise during 2022 was like offering someone who is drowning a glass of water. Other positions within the department of transportation include stipends to keep those roles filled. We need a significant increase in compensation, or a stipend immediately.

Many hundreds of employees in my bargaining unit travel with our personal vehicles to projects that we are assigned to. It isn't a choice, it is required as part of the job. The mileage reimbursement is currently at 45 cents per mile, well below the industry standard. Fuel costs since last summer have already more than doubled, and some folks including myself have over 130+ mile daily commutes (Aroostook County). Overnight and daily per diems are suddenly laughable, when folks who are travelling now have to pay 1.5 to 2 times as much for a meal than a year or two ago. Paying more than double fuel costs to travel to jobsites that we are required to be at, with our own vehicles that cost twice as much to operate, to work a position that is already significantly underpaid in comparison to private sector alternatives is a slap in the face to us, and a recipe for disaster for infrastructure in Maine. Things are getting crazy and anything less than a significant increase in pay as well as addressing the mileage reimbursement amount to at least meet the current federal standard of 62.5 cents per mile will be un-acceptable and I believe will truly be the end of many employees time with the State of Maine. We have people leaving the department to work for consultants who are then just hired back by the state at a much higher cost. In the end, people who pay taxes in Maine are the ones who suffer when we leave to go work for consultants at \$30-40 per hour, and the state pays the consulting firm over \$100 per hour to have the same people on our projects.

Most of us spent several years in college and worked for several years in the field learning our trades. Just in our office in Presque Isle alone we have 2 vacant assistant technician positions. These "entry level" jobs require 3 years of experience in civil engineering or a closely related field OR a degree in engineering! The starting pay is \$16.20 per hour! An oversight in my position could cost the state SEVERAL MILLION DOLLARS. An oversight at McDonalds could result in having to make a 3\$ cheeseburger a second time. These vacant positions have been advertised and no hires occurred as a result of their advertisement. This is a direct result of the pay offered, and nothing else. The last round of hiring resulted in one individual interviewed, who was significantly under-qualified for the position. These technical positions will not be filled if something does not happen soon to end this lack of fair compensation. Lowering the requirements of the positions will result in inadequate personnel filling the positions, which will cost the state money in repairs due to their lack of knowledge, and not filling the positions will cost the state money in costs paid to PRIVATE SECTOR CONSULTING FIRMS that are hired to do THE SAME ROLES as we do, for 3-5 times the cost. Some folks in the Maintenance and Operations sector (Transportation Operations Manager positions) receive double the pay that technicians receive. The requirements to be a TOM? 6-8 years of experience driving a plow truck. The requirement to be a

Technician? 5 years of experience in civil engineering, or a bachelors degree in engineering. Those of us in this role see over and over again people in that position screw up their jobs - costing the state money, and several times those of us in the technician series have to come up with a solution to repair their errors and teach their people how to do the job correctly and fix their mistakes. These people drive state vehicles, from their houses, and the state pays for their fuel. Entry level plow drivers that are hired at the State of Maine come in with no CDL often times, receive free training for their CDL and are offered \$18.31 hourly starting pay. Even they then leave to go work for private companies where they also receive 20-30% more money to do the same job. Things like this are infuriating and can only be made right with fair compensation. The general economic status, as well as the already existing pay gap for our series leaves myself and many others wondering how much longer we can AFFORD to work for the department, which for myself and many others is a job that we do truly care about and enjoy. Not staffing transportation workers results in immediate changes that will be obvious such as roads not being plowed, patching not being done, etc. The technicians and engineering staff are the ones that deliver large scale infrastructure improvement projects, lack of staffing on our end will be a leave a much longer lasting and more painful void that taxpayers and visitors who travel on Maine roads will feel.

What is being done to improve the employment conditions for those of us in the professional/technical bargaining unit, specifically the technician series? What is being done to address the mileage rate in this atmosphere of astronomical fuel and vehicle costs? What is being done to keep hard working folks like myself from leaving the state and taking our skills to private opportunities that will result in 30-50% compensation increases? This cannot wait. How many more studies need to be performed before we can fix the real problem? Workers stay at their place of employment when they feel that they are fairly compensated for their work. It really is that simple.