

BJ McCollister
Maine Labor Climate Council
LD 1064

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is BJ McCollister and I'm here representing the Maine Labor Climate Council (MLCC). MLCC is a coalition of 16 public and private sector unions representing thousands of working people across the state of Maine. We are committed to advancing an ambitious vision to combat climate change and income inequality at the same time.

One of our priorities as a coalition is to work together to create safe and healthy public schools for our students and teachers, slash energy costs and carbon emissions in our state, and support high-quality family-sustaining jobs by investing in deep energy efficient retrofits across all of our public school facilities.

It has become clear that a key benchmark for combating economic inequality in Maine will require increasing educators' salaries. This is the best way to address our growing teacher shortage – and for these reasons – MLCC is strongly supportive of LD 1064, An Act to Increase the Minimum Teacher Salary.

Every child in Maine deserves a caring and quality teacher in the classroom. But the reality is that teachers are leaving because they can earn more in another state or profession. If addressing the teacher shortage is a priority, then Maine must pay our teachers a competitive wage. Maine's students are faced with tremendous workforce shortages in nearly all teaching areas. Teachers are quitting, not retiring, and we understand that to be because their salaries can not sustain their own families' needs. The public sector has not kept pace with wage inflation in the private sector. This is not fair to students, teachers, and working families.

While the varied activities of local boosters are certainly a wonderful way to show our appreciation for our teachers, from the MLCC's perspective the primary way we show our respect for workers is by making sure they get paid appropriately, don't have to worry about getting sick, are cared for in their retirement, and have a say in how their work is done.

There can be no question about the importance of teachers and the work they do to inspire a love of learning in our children. Everything we do and want to do hinges on having a well educated citizenry. Any of us as parents and caregivers who had to navigate remote learning during the pandemic understand how hard a teacher's job is, and we only had our kids at home, not 20 or more kids! Supporting LD 1064 and raising teacher pay shows that we respect our teachers and are serious about keeping them in the classroom.

The 129th legislature raised the minimum to \$40,000 per year by 2020. That minimum salary had not been increased since 2007. We cannot wait that long again. Now is the time to do right by the women and men who teach our children.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter, and we sincerely hope that you will vote Ought to Pass on LD 1064.