

February 5, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, members of the Committee on State and Local Government. I'm writing in support of LD 2121, An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions.

My name is Kevin Hopkins, I am a full-time employee with the Maine State Ferry Service and reside on Vinalhaven, an island served by the Ferry Service. The vessels we operate cost \$10-15 million (depending on which size vessel is in service). Among many things, we carry one of the most precious cargos there is, people. People rely on us for their safety and the safety of their loved ones.

Due to recruitment issues, most employees start at the highest salary level for their position, step 8 and Captains now start at step 4 because the State cannot hire workers at the starting salary rates. Due to staffing shortages, my union and MaineDOT had to negotiate a recruitment and retention stipend for various classifications within Maine State Ferry Service. Captains are the only position which got a mere 3%, while others get 30%. MSFS Captains are severely underpaid compared to the Ferry Captain jobs in the region and country. Some of these jobs having starting pay rates that exceed our maximum wage, this is not sustainable and had led to an interruption of our services.

In the past two years, these preventable staffing shortages have caused ferries to be canceled and terminals closed. This has left passengers missing medical appointments, cancer treatments, school sports. During these times, freight hasn't gotten to the island communities which interferes with the islanders and our economy that depend on an uninterrupted ferry service. Crews have had to work extra shifts to allow other coworkers to get to appointments and take vacation. We are essential employees. The ferries cannot operate if a crew member is absent for any reason.

This past summer I alone worked as Captain for 21 days straight after having my vacation request denied, due to no reliefs, 11.5-hour days with no breaks. One pay period I had 82.5 hrs of overtime on top of my normal 80 hrs – Ferry Captains do not get premium overtime pay.

Positions have been posted, yet they don't get filled. Most recently management has swapped vessels between Vinalhaven and Islesboro due to crew shortages. Islesboro had canceled trips due to crew shortage, so the vessel that can (doesn't mean it should for safety reasons) operate with one less crew member was sent to Islesboro from Vinalhaven. The vessel requiring 5 crew was put in service on Vinalhaven. In the past week one trip was delayed and one whole day canceled for that vessel due to crew shortages with the possibility of more cancellations this week.

Our crews rescue lives, as they did this summer off Islesboro. The islanders and the island tourist industries depend on us. LD 2121 will help the Maine State Ferry Service run smoother, more consistently, and allow us spend our earned time with our families free from guilt. I ask

that this committee and the Maine Legislature support LD2121 so the State of Maine can more reliably service these island communities.

Respectfully,

Captain Kevin Hopkins
Vinalhaven, Maine