

TESTIMONY OF REBEKAH L KOROSKI  
TO THE COMMITTEE ON STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
FEBRUARY 8, 2024

Representative Stover, Senator Nangle and members of the Committee on State and Local Government. My name is Rebekah Koroski and I appreciate you taking the time to hear my position on LD 2121 – An Act to Address Chronic Understaffing of State Government Positions.

I am currently a Management Analyst II with the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. I have been a State Employee for almost 23.5 years. I apologize that I am unable to testify in person, as I am working on documenting expenses for roughly 100 oil spills reported as a result of the December 18, 2023 storm that caused flooding throughout the State for potential FEMA reimbursement. That is on top of my normal caseload.

When the price of gas drastically increased, State employees salaries were kept stagnant, making it more difficult to be able to afford to drive to work. In previous administrations, when the costs of everything was going up, the State employees were told that there was either no money to pay us, or that we needed to sacrifice for the good of the State as a whole. The State even expected the Retired Public Employees to sacrifice for the rest of the State when they reduced the cap on the COLA in 2011 to pay for tax cuts. In hindsight, I feel it showed that we were not valued as a whole – active or retired public employees.

Some of us, myself included, even went without merit increases because of budget constraints. I remember my supervisor writing a comment on a performance appraisal that I deserved a merit increase, but would not be getting one because merit increases were frozen in the budget.

During this time, the cost of our health insurance contributions also increased. We were getting squeezed on both sides. I am the child of a former State Employee. I remember what the health insurance was like back in the early 1990's. Having the health insurance that we had as a benefit paid for by the State with little to no co-pays was a decent trade-off at the time, especially if you had to see a lot of doctors or had small children. With how much and how fast the employee costs for the health plan have increased since 2000, it doesn't have the same appeal as a tradeoff for lower pay as it once did because the

employee could be paying over \$200.00 a paycheck for their spouse to be on the plan AND the family deductible has increased to \$1,100.00.

Here is a random thought that popped into my head and I wonder if this has anything to do with the State Employees being underpaid: There is also a public stigma attached to being a State Employee. I work hard and do my best to be a high performer. I remember interviewing for a job in a lab in the private sector. I had barely worked for the State for 6 months at the time. The owner of the company asked me why I would want to leave my cushy State job to come work for them. At that point, I was sure that I wasn't being seriously considered for the job all because I had a job with the State of Maine.

From my point of view, the State has been aware of the extent of the pay gap for quite a while. In April 2009, I was appointed as a representative of MSEA's Professional & Technical Bargaining Unit to work on the PRO TECH Pay Study Committee. In our monthly meetings, we reviewed job specifications, updated them based on input from member surveys, and scored those job specifications to determine where those jobs belonged on the scale. We were able to reach the point where we compared the pay of our classifications to those comparable in other states and in the private sector. I believe that it was late 2010 or early 2011 when we were making these comparisons. At that time, the median pay for a Management Analyst outside of Maine State Government was \$34.00 per hour. I was nearly topped out as a Management Analyst II and did not make even close to that amount. 13 years later, the top of the pay scale for a Management Analyst II is \$32.52. I am sure that the median pay for the Management Analyst ladder outside of State Government has increased as well. Once we reached that point and knew the disparity in pay for the classifications that held many people, the process ended. The State did not want to engage in the collaborative process any longer.

I found this interesting and thought I would share. I live in Cumberland County. The median income for those living in Cumberland County in 2023 was \$102,800. If you make 50% of that amount individually, or \$52,050, you are considered low income for the county. With the raise executive branch employees received on January 1, 2024, I am now making 66% of the median income for my county.

With the costs of everything going up, having that much of a disparity between your income & the median income can make it difficult when you need to purchase a vehicle. I cannot save enough to purchase a vehicle with cash, so I have to finance it. I have

better than decent credit, but not quite excellent. My interest rate for the loan for my car was 14.51%. That made it a little bit painful to go from no car payment to an almost \$400 per month car payment.

At my Department, we have nearly 50 positions vacant. That may not seem like many, but we are a small Department. We feel most of those vacancies in licensing positions. Management is having difficulties keeping and retaining staff because to hire from the outside, those staff start at step 1 on the scale. There is very little wiggle room on that. This perpetuates the continuation of our staff doing more with less resources.

Thank you again for taking the time to allow me to share my perspective on the pay gap. My understanding is that the State's compensation and classification study fell short of the mark. That is disappointing. Please hold the State accountable and help us close the pay gap. We are not asking for a lot. We are asking to be respected enough for the State to pay us properly for the essential services that we provide to the public.