

Testimony of Beth White
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
and the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,
1 pm Friday day, February 7, 2025, State House Room 228 and Electronically

LD 210, An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds
for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to
the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026
and June 30, 2027, (Emergency) (Governor's Bill),
Sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I'm Beth White, director of politics and legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. We are a labor union representing over 13,000 Maine workers, including workers at the Maine Department of Education (DOE) and Child Development Services (CDS), a publicly funded agency overseen by the Maine DOE.

First, we support the proposal for the state to meet its obligation to fund public education at 55 percent, as well as the proposed reclassifications, reorganizations, range changes. We're also pleased to see the continuation of limited duration positions and the creation of new positions within the Department of Education.

Next, given the enormous waitlists for services provided through CDS, we're encouraged to see an increase in funding for the agency. Our members at CDS do incredible, life-changing work and they care deeply about the children and families they serve. That said, the proposed increase of 4%, or \$57,943, seems low given that last year, [560 children with disabilities remained on waitlists](#) for early intervention services. We're encouraged by the actions the legislature has taken to address waitlists, however, understaffing at CDS remains a key contributing factor. As of this morning, there were [35 posted job opportunities](#), though it's important to note that many of these postings are for multiple openings of the same positions. Not only are there many openings at CDS, but the pay listed for them is low, making it harder to recruit and retain qualified staff. We respectfully urge legislators and the administration to invest in Child Development Services and make eliminating these waitlists a priority for this proposed two-year State Budget. It's so important that we all do everything within our power to ensure that all Maine children receive the services they are entitled to receive in our great state.

As for the Maine DOE, it's important to note that as with all departments throughout Maine State Government, there remains a real problem with understaffing that is directly tied to low pay. It's our understanding that as of November 2024, Maine DOE's bureaus and administration had 20 vacancies and 123 filled positions for a total vacancy rate of 14%. And the vacancy problem is worse for the Maine DOE's schools in the unorganized territories. It's our understanding that when it comes to Maine DOE workers at the schools in the unorganized territories, there were 86 vacancies and only 58 filled positions, for a vacancy rate of nearly 60% -- so ye, there were more vacant positions than filled ones in the school districts serving children in Maine's unorganized territories as of November 2024. We think that level of vacancies is unconscionable, and we respectfully urge this Legislature and the administration to work to fill those positions immediately so the children and families who count on the

schools in Maine's unorganized territories can get the proper public education they both deserve and are entitled to under Maine law.

Such high levels of vacancies at Maine's State-run schools and throughout Maine State Government illustrate why we are extremely concerned about the Governor's proposal (Part R) to remove nearly \$44 million from the State's personnel budget and transfer that amount into the General Fund, where it would be used for other purposes. The administration proposes to more than triple the state employee attrition rate, from 1.6% to 5%, in both the Executive and Judicial branches of Maine State Government, in order to justify this proposed financial maneuver. Understaffing throughout all departments of state government remains a serious problem often with devastating consequences on both state workers and Maine people who rely on their services. The State's own studies show that state workers remain substantially underpaid compared to their public and private sector counterparts throughout Maine and New England. [Please see the related memo](#), attached to my testimony, that we presented to the Appropriations Committee on Oct. 8, 2024, detailing our response to the State's Market Pay Report dated Sept. 30, 2024.

The money in the State's Salary Plan is there to fund budgeted positions and to close the state employee pay gap, and it shouldn't be used as a piggybank to fund other priorities. We'd like to respectfully remind you that Part PPP of the Supplemental Budget passed by the Legislature and signed into law on April 22, 2024, expressly authorizes the administration to use all funds in the State's Salary Plan to negotiate with us over the implementation of a new compensation and classification system for Executive Branch workers—and those negotiations are ongoing. The administration's proposal to transfer nearly \$44 million from the State's personnel budget into the General Fund appears to be an attempt to end run Part PPP. We ask that you reject this change and ensure these resources are used to address these serious recruitment and retention issues.

We look forward to working with you, your fellow members of the 132nd Legislature and the administration to develop and pass a two-year State Budget that truly meets the needs of all Maine people. Thank you and I'd be glad to answer any questions.