

Joshua Chard  
SOUTH PORTLAND  
LD 34

My name is Joshua Chard, and I am honored to serve as Maine's 2024 Teacher of the Year. I teach at East End Community School, a high-needs urban school where I witness daily the dedication and perseverance of educators who work tirelessly to meet the diverse academic, social, and emotional needs of their students. I submit this testimony in strong support of LD 34 – An Act to Increase the Minimum Salary for Teachers.

The foundation of a strong public education system is a well-supported, highly skilled teaching workforce. Yet, in Maine, many educators—particularly those at the beginning of their careers—struggle to make ends meet. Despite earning degrees, completing certification programs, and taking on the immense responsibility of shaping young minds, too many new teachers face financial hardship.

A low minimum salary makes it difficult to attract and retain talented educators. Across the state, we see vacancies left unfilled, increasing the burden on already overextended teachers. Those who remain often take on extra jobs, work excessive hours, or leave the profession altogether in search of financial stability. This is not sustainable. We cannot expect our schools to provide the quality education our students deserve if we do not pay teachers a livable wage.

Increasing the minimum teacher salary is a necessary step to ensure that Maine remains competitive in recruiting and retaining dedicated professionals in education. This investment will not only strengthen the teaching profession but also directly benefit our students, who thrive under the guidance of experienced, supported educators.

I urge this committee to support LD 34 and demonstrate a commitment to the educators who play a critical role in Maine's future. Thank you for your time and consideration.