

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs committee. Senator Baldacci, Representative Roberts, members of the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. My name is Mike Andrews, I am writing on my own personal time to speak about the need for more funding for the Executive Branch personnel services budget in LD210.

I work at the Dry Mills State Fish Hatchery in Gray for the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. I have worked for the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife for 37 years. In the last 4 years at the Dry Mills State Fish Hatchery in Gray, Maine, we have had significant turnover and were shorthanded for an extended period of time.

Within the department's hatcheries division, our wages are extremely low, and DIF&W has been unable to allocate enough money to pay us for overtime work for years. They are looking to supplement their budget using the hatchery maintenance fund. A temporary fix? Yes, but a necessary one. Commissioner Judy Camuso has acknowledged we are woefully underpaid at a recent DIF&W legislative committee meeting. She's right.

The most difficult aspect of this is training employees just to have them leave for better pay elsewhere! Retention is at an all-time low and recruitment is very difficult at this time. I realize this is an issue all across Maine's Executive Branch departments; however, it is especially difficult when my colleagues and I are in charge of raising and stocking live fish for the public.

We have seen many examples of the hatcheries losing good people do to low pay – many are tired of fighting with the state for more pay for themselves and their employees. I personally would leave also; however, I am close to retirement. Most left for better-paying jobs and some out of frustration with issues in Augusta. One of the most frustrating aspects of this situation is our long-term employees training new hires for a year only for them to leave for better pay elsewhere. This is not sustainable, or a fiscally responsible way to maintain state government operations.

The bottom line is that finding good, qualified people and keeping them is difficult with such low wages. I believe the only way to retain workers is to close the pay gap between state employees and private sector employees. You can help by rejecting the proposal to take away \$44 million from the personnel services budget and work to increase funding instead.

Thank you to all legislators for listening to my testimony.

Sincerely yours,

Mike Andrews