

Heather Whitaker  
Windham  
LD 34  
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Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

I have dedicated the past twenty-four years as a public educator, currently serving as the alternative education teacher in the Gorham School Department. I am honored to be the 2020 Maine Teacher of the Year and Co-President of the Maine County and State Teachers of the Year Association. I am writing to express my strong support for LD 34: An Act to Increase the Minimum Salary for Teachers.

Maine faces a critical challenge in recruiting and retaining qualified educators. While efforts such as teacher recruitment campaigns, strong preparation programs, and supportive communities help attract educators, they are not enough without competitive salaries. Too many newly certified teachers, eager to begin their careers, leave Maine for states that offer higher wages and greater financial stability. Teachers hold at least a bachelor's degree, with many pursuing advanced certifications, yet their starting salaries remain uncompetitive compared to other professions requiring similar education. Raising the minimum salary would acknowledge their expertise and make it possible for more educators to stay and build long-term careers in Maine.

Passing LD 34 is not just about supporting teachers—it is an investment in students. Schools that can attract and retain high-quality educators provide greater stability, experience, and innovation in the classroom. High turnover rates and staffing shortages disrupt learning, affecting both student achievement and school culture. Ensuring teachers earn a fair and competitive salary strengthens the profession, improves student outcomes, and reinforces Maine's commitment to providing every child with a high-quality education.

I urge you to support this bill to strengthen our schools and invest in Maine's future. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Heather Whitaker  
Co-President Maine County and State Teachers of the Year Association  
2019 Cumberland County Teacher of the Year  
2020 Maine Teacher of the Year  
2023 Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes Fellow