

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 34

OFFICERS

AN ACT TO INCREASE THE MINIMUM SALARY FOR TEACHERS

February 26, 2025

PRESIDENT

Faye Anderson
RSU 22

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Faye Anderson, the president of the Maine School Boards Association, speaking in opposition to L.D. 34. Our association represents local school board members from small rural districts to urban districts throughout our state. We have members from 9 regions across the state: from northern to southern Maine from Downeast and coastal regions to western Maine.

PRESIDENT-ELECT

Joseph Long
MSAD 35/RSU 35

VICE PRESIDENT

Roy Gott
RSU 24

I am a retired teacher and administrator, and I understand the need for higher pay. I know the amount of work teachers are dedicating to their profession to support the students of Maine and our public schools. We know that increased teacher salaries can have a positive impact to attract and retain quality teachers within our schools, and increased salaries can highlight teaching within Maine schools as the job to seek.

**IMMEDIATE PAST
PRESIDENT**

Jane Osborne
Deer Isle-Stonington CSD

Locally, our school districts are already acknowledging the need to increase teacher pay in order to attract and retain quality educators. Over the past few years, we have seen districts finalize new collective bargaining agreements with salary increases totaling as high as 15 or 20 percent, over three years. We are doing more than ever to provide the salaries and benefits that our educators need and deserve.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Steven W. Bailey

However, MSBA believes that teacher compensation must be a local decision and should not be mandated by the state. Our school board members are the ones balancing student needs, teacher contracts, and the financial constraints of our local communities. Our schools and school board members understand the needs and concerns of our residents, and it should be our local decisions – not those of the state – that determine educator salary.

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**MAINE COUNCIL OF
SCHOOL BOARD
ATTORNEYS**

Isabel Ekman, Esq., Chair

Across Maine, our school boards are hearing loud and clear from residents saying that they cannot handle any more property tax increases. Last year, at least half-a-dozen communities rejected school budgets that they deemed too high. Inflation has made everything more expensive, from energy to school supplies. Unfunded mandates have played a role, too – new paid leave laws, as well as wage increases for ed techs that we expect to raise school budgets by tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Our school budgets are stretched thin.

Maine is the oldest state in the country. Many of our constituents are retired and on a fixed income and we have many low-income families. Any tax increase falls to them, and we hear how they can't afford the rising cost of education.

Some districts in wealthier communities may be able to afford these increases and are perhaps nearing the salary proposal in L.D. 34. But we know so many other parts of our state don't have the same resources. Please take into consideration our entire state when deliberating L.D. 34.

We appreciate that L.D. 34 would include some funding to help our schools increase the minimum teacher salary, but for how long and to what degree? We know from experience that increases to the minimum salary will also push up the salaries of other, more experienced teachers in future collective bargaining agreements. One district estimates that if the minimum teacher salary rose to \$50,000, their salary scale would need to increase 15 to 20 percent.

We are concerned that our local schools would be responsible for these additional costs, which could total hundreds of thousands of dollars. This would further exacerbate our local budget challenges, potentially leading to voters rejecting school budgets or forcing us to cut back on needed services for children. At a time when we are still working hard to help students recover from the effects of the pandemic, we do not want this to happen.

Our association also has deep concerns about Part 5 of this bill, which requires a yearly cost-of-living increase to the state's minimum teacher salary after 2030. This would not come with additional state funding. We understand the importance of yearly salary increases to help teachers' income keep up with inflation, and nearly all of our school districts already include these annual increases in collective bargaining agreements. But a state mandate would remove the ability of school districts to respond to financial downturns, a loss of state funding, or other financial emergencies. Without that flexibility, it could increase the likelihood of layoffs. We do not want to see this happen.

Again, our association believes deeply in paying our teachers more, but local school districts should be the ones making these decisions. We do not believe L.D. 34 provides enough support for our local schools, and we are concerned that its consequences could further challenge local school budgets and put more of a burden on local property taxes.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.