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As a second-generation educator and spouse of an educator, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges and rewards of a teaching career. Combined, my spouse and I have dedicated almost 30 years to shaping young minds, yet our household income hovers around \$100,000 annually. This may seem like a substantial amount, but when we consider that both of us work during the summer and earn stipends for additional positions we take on at school the number is far too low. Couple this with the rising costs of living in Maine, it becomes clear that educators here deserve a pay increase. Since 2020, the average home price in Maine has surged by 50%. This dramatic increase in housing costs places significant financial pressure on families, including those of teachers. With the average income in Maine rising by 33% during the same period, the cost of living and income have only increased for Mainers in the past 5 years. Teachers have seen an even more modest salary increase of 12.5% for minimum teacher salaries over the same timeframe. The increase may be in good faith, but it fails to reflect the reality of these rising costs of everything. Some teacher salaries make it impossible to live in the communities they serve.

Teachers are often underappreciated and undervalued. They play a crucial role in society, shaping the future by educating the next generation. Yet, the financial compensation for this essential work does not match the dedication and effort that teachers put into their jobs. Many educators work long hours, often extending their days beyond the classroom to prepare lessons, grade assignments, and support their students' needs. Despite these commitments, teacher salaries remain stagnant and fail to provide financial security. If you have been in education for more than a few years you have seen one gifted teacher after another leave the profession for something with less stress and higher pay. This revolving door creates instability in the lives of our young people. They rely on the relationships they form with their teachers and when they leave, it creates disorder for our kids and our school buildings into turmoil. Investing in our educators is investing in our future. When teachers are compensated fairly, they are more likely to stay in the profession, leading to a stable and experienced workforce. Higher salaries can also attract talented individuals to the field, ensuring that our students receive the best education possible. In turn, this fosters a better learning environment, ultimately benefiting society as a whole.