

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

I am writing in support of LD 34, An Act to Increase the Minimum Salary for Teachers.

My name is Grace Leavitt. I live in Raymond. I am recently retired, having taught for over 43 years and subsequently having served for two terms as President of the Maine Education Association. I currently serve on my local school board, though I am not writing this testimony in that capacity—I mention that only to convey that I understand the challenge that passing this may be for those of us in this role. Nonetheless, despite the challenge, this legislation is definitely needed.

As you know, and as you have heard and read in the testimony of many others, the shortage of educators continues, and even increases. And I know you understand, and have also heard from many others, that the most important factor in providing a quality education to all of our students is having a qualified teacher. Yes, as some have said, there are other elements that have an impact on the situation, and work needs to continue to address these and make improvements. But the primary factor that will help to decrease the shortage and may even see an increase in attracting more to the profession of teaching is a **professional** salary. Additionally, increasing the starting salary will go a long way towards retaining qualified educators.

Some may express concern that more veteran teachers may resent, or at least be dismayed by, a higher beginning salary. But as someone who has served many times on local association negotiating teams, I know that any concern in that regard is addressed through that process, as well as by explaining the overall improvement of career earnings for all, which in turn improves retirement benefits.

But the major point I would like to make regarding the need to increase the starting salary is that it will be an indication that our state does indeed recognize that educators provide a truly valuable and critically essential public service. While many, dare I say nearly all, profess to respect our educators and admire their dedication and passion for working with our students, merely saying that, or having a yearly ‘teacher appreciation day’, is not enough when other professions have substantially higher salaries. Our educators are indeed dedicated. They are passionate. They do enter the profession, and try to stay in it, ‘for the kids’. But too many are unable to make it work, to pay the bills, to provide for their own children, and ultimately many feel **dis**respected because the low salaries contradict the value that the public says they place on the profession.

Educators are the people who make all other professions possible. Our children—all of our children—need us to ensure that they have the well-rounded, quality public education that they deserve. Our local communities need the support at the state level to help with fulfilling the promise of public education.

Thank you for your attention to this. Not only do I hope you will all vote ‘ought to pass’ on LD 34, but I hope that you all will work with your fellow legislators to find the means to make this happen, to be passed as well as funded.

Grace Leavitt
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