

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs committee. Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, members of the Transportation Committee. We write to you as MSEA Union Members that work at MaineDOT in West Gardiner. We are writing this testimony on our own personal time.

We are testifying today to advocate for a much-needed pay increase for our crew and our coworkers across the State of Maine. The reality is that our current wages do not align with the cost of living, and many of us struggle each month just to afford basic necessities like rent, groceries, and utilities. We are not asking for anything unreasonable—we are simply asking for fair compensation that allows us to live without financial hardship.

We fully recognize that wages are set in contract bargaining. However, we have been consistently told that we can't get the pay increases we deserve because there is not enough money in the budget. That is why we are asking for your support to make progress on increasing funding for the Executive Branch personnel services budget, so the Administration can afford to help State Employees earn a living wage. In turn, we will be able to better help you via our work with Maine's highway and bridge infrastructure.

Beyond that, there is a clear pay disparity when comparing our wages to similar jobs in the industry. Many of these positions offer nearly double what we currently make, making it difficult to retain skilled employees and attract new talent. If we are expected to meet high standards and perform difficult, demanding work, we should be compensated accordingly.

Additionally, there is a well-recognized distinction between the bridge and highway divisions. Many employees acknowledge that bridge work is significantly harder, requiring specialized knowledge, training, and increased physical demands. In fact, bridge knowledge was even taken into consideration as a qualification for career advancement, proving its additional complexity and value. However, our wages do not reflect that additional responsibility. If the job is more difficult and requires greater expertise, then the pay should reflect that reality.

A pay increase isn't just about fairness—it's about the future of our workforce. If wages remain stagnant, we risk losing skilled employees to higher-paying opportunities, creating instability within our team and affecting overall productivity. Investing in fair wages means investing in a dedicated, experienced workforce that can continue to meet the demands of this job. With a more skilled and knowledgeable DOT Highway crew, we will be better equipped to give more time and attention to Maine's transportation systems under our scope of responsibility.

We take pride in the work we do, and all we ask is to be paid fairly for it. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

MSEA-SEIU Local 1989 Members of the MaineDOT Highway Crew
West Gardiner