

Dr Erin Beal LD 696 Testimony

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and other esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Dr Erin Beal. I work at Lyman Moore Middle School in Portland as an instructional coach. I grew up in West Kennebunk and now live in Windham. I am here today to testify in support of LD 696, An Act to Bolster the Maine Teacher Residency Program.

I have always had a soft spot for early career educators. When I worked for the University of Southern Maine, I ran weekly seminars for college students completing their teacher internships. I also hosted several interns from both USM and Saint Joseph's College. I saw firsthand the time, effort, and money they were pouring into their first years in the field of education. I'm not sure if you're aware, but to complete student teaching in Maine you must pay full time tuition, work full teaching hours, and complete coursework. Of course, not only is this labor unpaid, college students are paying full tuition for the opportunity to complete their internship. This creates incredible stress for the prospective educators who now must squeeze in a second job at night or on the weekends to pay for luxuries such as food and rent.

When I completed my own student teaching I worked 2 additional jobs to help cover living expenses, working every closing shift on week days and every day shift on the weekends. That was in Farmington (many) years ago, where I paid only \$350 in rent. We know that rent in Maine average about 4 times that today. There are simply not enough hours in the week for these student teachers to complete their internship, their coursework, and work for income to pay their bills. When we make college students choose between an internship and shelter, we dissuade them from even entering the profession.

As an instructional coach, I work with phenomenal early career educators. Our school depends on our teacher interns to bring us the most updated teaching practices, classroom management strategies, and optimism. In my work, I see teacher interns connecting with students with ease and relevance, in ways that veteran teachers marvel at. Nobody in public education works more hours or cares more about their students' success, both personally and academically, than our teacher interns.

However, we have seen enrollment in educator prep programs decrease sharply in the past decade. Much of this can be blamed on the insurmountable fiscal ask of an unpaid, yearlong internship and low starting salaries. Students know they will graduate in debt and will make a salary too low to pay them down in any meaningful way. We already know that Maine has significant issues with teacher retention, but unpaid teacher internships make it nearly impossible to attract teachers in the first place. The only way we can remove the most pressing barrier to attracting qualified educators in Maine is to pay student teachers for their incredibly valuable contributions to their school community and to their state.