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I'm a worker in Maine and have been for coming on 5 years now. I am also a graduate, seeking a job in my field. Multiple times, I had been ready to potentially move out of my family's home and seek self-reliance. However, as time as gone on, not only is cost of living so high I cannot foresee affording even small apartments on top of bills, food, gas and car maintenance, etc. As of 2024, cost of living is so high even that is a far off concern, as now a portion of my full-time paycheck goes to supporting the family I live with, a disabled veteran and his disabled wife/my mother, because the cost of heating, groceries, healthcare, electricity, etc. outweighs their income and without me, we would both be homeless. Any attempts at savings I tried throughout the years would later be emptied to avoid a winter in sub zero temperatures for oil for heating and hot water, or my online schooling and internship unavailable because the electricity bill was too high for them to pay. The average pay at jobs even requiring my degree and level of education, through my own math, would barely be able to support them, nonetheless any dreams of saving up to separate from home. And when the wages for jobs in my field aren't higher than my current retail job, they're exactly the same or even less, and it's boggling to fathom that 4 years of education could earn the same as what could be a summer job for others, though they are no less deserving of a living wage. I know I am not the only person in Maine struggling to make ends meet despite full-time work, and I am at least lucky in that I have a home and support network, but who can say the same for those without family, for those who rent, for those who don't make enough to have savings and emergency funds and thus one missed paycheck, one hospital stay could be a game ender. It only makes sense that workers are paid in a way realistic to the cost of living, or else we're stuck in the cost of simply surviving.