

My name is Livia Neuhauser and I attend University of Maine Orono as a student and I live in Orono. I am here today to testify in support of LD 1327.

When I first started my education degree, I had every intention of becoming a high school teacher. I believed this was the path for me and that any other profession would not fulfill me the way being an educator would. However, as I completed my 100-hour observation and approached the student teaching phase of my undergraduate career, I was forced to face some hard truths.

Not only are students expected to work full-time, but they are also expected to cover tuition, living expenses, and in the case of Maine, transportation. Personally, undertaking student teaching at the school I had previously been placed at for observation meant driving nearly an hour to and from, all the while going into debt, and I felt it was not a sustainable nor reasonable option. As a result, I realized that entering the teaching profession, as noble and fulfilling as it is, would not work for the future I intended for myself.

It was a difficult decision leaving behind all I had worked towards the last three and a half years, though I used this new time and energy to reinvest and redirect my energy into other ways I could help students, teachers, and the public school system as a whole. With my spare time no longer student teaching I studied for the LSAT, applied to law school, and received admission offers I would go on to accept.

I like to think I still carry the passion of an educator, but now I carry it differently. Instead channeling it into policy, justice, and systemic change. I have nothing but respect for those who continued down the path of teaching, though for me it just no longer presented itself as an option. If I had been compensated for student teaching I think I would have continued to completion, or perhaps if the cost of the twelve credits it represents had been waived, though they weren't and now I will attend law school in the fall and not a classroom of my own. I understand this is not a simple issue because if it were it would have been fixed long ago, but I also think saying "it's complicated" shouldn't stop us from continuing to try and fix it. I didn't walk away from teaching because I lacked passion, and shy away from hard work—I walked away because the system made it too hard to stay. Now, as I head to law school, I hope to work toward these kinds of changes so future educators aren't forced to choose between their calling and making ends meet.