

Zachary Wentworth
Calais
LD 1327

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, other esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Zach Wentworth and I am from Calais and attend the University of Maine at Orono with a major in Secondary Education social studies. Currently I am a student teaching at Orono High School as a social studies teacher. I am in support of LD 1327, an act that would pay student teachers and mentor teachers.

Student teaching is a required element of teacher preparation programs where college students typically in their last semester pay over \$12,000 in tuition, and work 40 plus unpaid hours a week in a classroom and take over almost all duties of the classroom teacher. I would describe it as an intensive learning experience, crucial to educator development, but what I also want to describe it as is a grueling hardship.

In January on the Orono campus Student MEA a club for aspiring educators opened a food pantry for student teachers in response to the sheer number of student teachers who are choosing between rent and groceries. I personally work in the evenings about 20 hours a week so while I can afford rent I usually only get 5 hours of sleep a night. However, a good friend of mine has come to me crying asking me how she will afford rent and food for the month, her credit card is maxed out, she carpools to work and still she has to choose between ramen and paying for a roof over her head. People like her and I are the future of Maine's educator workforce and quite frankly I am not confident that education is a sustainable career despite my passion for it. Imagine attempting to earn a degree that will give you the opportunity to educate the next generation, and you rely on a food pantry and your credit card to get by. The person I have described is resilient and passionate, and able to scrape by, but many of my peers are not so fortunate. Funny, I would describe someone relying on a food pantry and a credit card as fortunate, but many passionate peers choose not to student teach to avoid the hardship or simply because it would result in homelessness, food insecurity or they can't afford the tuition to begin with. Unfortunately this means aspiring educators do not complete student teaching and do not earn certification and more importantly do not gain the crucial skills such as behavior management to succeed in our bleeding educator workforce.

The words "Why would you be a teacher?" have landed upon my ears far too many times, a few times from teachers themselves, and if student teaching is the start of a person's career and extreme hardship is the experience I begin to wonder the same thing. Why would I be a teacher? Well because it is my passion and my number one goal every day is to positively impact at least one student's life and learning. This semester in my student teaching I am confident that I have positively impacted more than one students learning and have gained a plethora of skills that will help me succeed as a teacher in the coming years and continue to positively impact Maine students. However this learning experience came at a cost to me in my ways. I dealt with financial hardship, mental health struggles, and lack of sleep. All of this and I still showed up at 7:30 AM every day for 15 weeks and helped students grow and learn, some that engaged in the negative behaviors we too often hear of and some that struggle academically. I showed up for those kids everyday and despite the poor circumstances tried to make a difference and better myself. I hope in the future it is easier for student teachers to show up and give it their all and make a difference in their students education and their own.

Finally, I have watched my mentor teacher put hours of work into developing me as an educator and she receives less than \$500 dollars for the many hours of written feedback, help developing lessons and reflecting on my practice. My mentor teacher has graciously vowed to help develop aspiring teachers and said she was excited to buy a pair of new shoes with her compensation for mentoring my for 15 weeks. I am so grateful she felt a responsibility to develop the next generation of teachers and put

so much time and effort into me, but it shouldn't be an expectation that teachers do this for little to nothing.

For all of these reasons I support LD 1327, it is critical that the state of Maine ensures teachers are entering the field and paying student teachers is one action that would move the dial on this issue.

Thank you for your time and all of your work,
Zachary Wentworth