

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

My name is Mikyla Howland, and I attend the University of Maine as an elementary education major and live in Orono. I am currently student teaching at an elementary school in Hampden. I am writing to express my strong support for LD 1327.

Student teaching is an incredibly rewarding experience. Every day, I have the opportunity to help shape the lives of young learners by supporting them academically, emotionally, and socially. I work side by side with an amazing mentor teacher, preparing lessons, leading instruction, grading assignments, and handling the many responsibilities of a full-time educator. But despite this level of involvement and dedication, student teachers like me are not paid for our work.

This unpaid labor comes at a real cost. Because student teaching is a full-time commitment, I do not have the time to hold a job to support myself. Instead, I've been relying on student loans and the money I managed to save over the summer just to get by. Each week, I face the stress of making ends meet, figuring out how to pay for groceries, gas, rent, and basic necessities.

Luckily, I have very supportive parents who I know would help me financially if it came down to it. But that financial burden should not be their concern.

I know other student teachers who do not have that same support and are truly left to choose between buying groceries and paying rent. This is why, as a member of the Student Maine Education Association, I worked alongside other aspiring educators to create a food pantry for students in need. We were seeing the struggle of other education students firsthand and wanted to help ease this financial burden in any way possible.

The financial strain is accompanied by a strong emotional toll. Student teaching demands the same energy and commitment as a professional teaching position, but without the financial stability. It is mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausting to pour so much into this work without being compensated at all. And yet, I continue because I love this work and believe deeply in the importance of public education.

If we want to strengthen our public education system and recruit the best and brightest into the teaching profession, we must support aspiring teachers. The paid student teaching suggested in LD 1327 would help relieve financial hardship, reduce barriers to entering the field, and recognize the vital contribution student teachers already make in classrooms across our state.

Thank you for your time, your attention, and your commitment to the future of education in Maine. I'm grateful for everything you do to support the people of Maine.

Mikyla Howland