

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, I am Bonnie Richards. I testifying on my own time to speak about chronic staffing issues and the state employee pay gap for Maine's Executive Branch workers in LD 2212.

I work as a Customer Rep Assoc II at the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. I work in one of the lowest paid departments in DHHS, starting wage of \$15.45, some of my co-workers struggle to live. A 65-year-old colleague of mine has to supplement her income working a second job at Walmart in the evenings, working 60 plus hours a week. This is not uncommon, and this is a horrible standard for Maine State workers. To be forced to work so much at 65 when you work for the state is terrible, this worker had a stroke and had to go back to work after 2 weeks because her sick leave was used up.

A different coworker had a spouse diagnosed with cancer, she spent 2 years flexing time so she could take him to treatment and scans because she couldn't afford to lose income.

My husband worked for DOT for 7 years, he missed all holidays and birthdays, including his father's last Christmas, Thanksgiving and birthday to clear snow from the storms, he left DOT after 7 years only making \$19.16.

The Maine State Employee Pay Gap has existed for too long, and we the workers sacrifice so much for the State of Maine, only to be denied fair pay year, after year, after year. We need the \$56 million you took from our salary last year to fund a fair union contract. The longer this problem goes on, the more quality workers leave state service, and the more well qualified candidates pass up on the state's job postings. Please use this surplus to help us close the pay gap. It will help us support our families, and better support the people of Maine.