

## **Testimony in Support of Increasing the Starting Salary for Educators to \$50,000**

Senator Peggy Rotundo and Representative Marie Mastraccio, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Karen MacDonald, a resident of Westbrook, a retired educator of 37 years, and the 2014 Maine Teacher of the Year. I want to express strong support for the use of supplemental budget funds to move our state towards a starting salary for educators of \$50,000.

This investment is not simply about raising salaries. It is about stabilizing our schools, strengthening our communities, and protecting the future of public education.

To start, raising the starting salary is essential for retention of our early career teachers. We are losing talented, passionate educators within their first five years because they cannot justify staying in a profession they love but that does not provide financial stability. Teaching is demanding, emotionally and intellectually. When compensation does not reflect that reality, burnout accelerates. Competitive starting salaries send a clear message that we value educators' expertise and commitment. Stability in staffing directly benefits students, who thrive when they have consistent, experienced teachers in their classrooms.

Increasing the starting salary to \$50,000 would allow educators to afford basic housing in the communities they serve. In many parts of our state, the current starting salary makes it nearly impossible for a first-year teacher to rent an apartment, let alone purchase a home. Young educators are often forced to live far from their schools, take on additional jobs, or leave the profession entirely because the financial strain is unsustainable. When educators have to take second jobs to pay their basic bills, it limits their time to provide meaningful feedback to students, connect with parents, and design engaging learning experiences. When teachers cannot afford to live in the communities where they work, it undermines their ability to fully participate in school life and community engagement.

Finally, increasing starting pay is critical for recruitment. Colleges and universities are seeing declining enrollment in teacher preparation programs. Young people are making practical decisions about career paths, and compensation plays a significant role. When other professions requiring similar levels of education offer substantially higher starting salaries, we cannot be surprised when fewer candidates choose teaching. Raising the starting salary to \$50,000 positions education as a viable, respected career choice and helps us compete for talented individuals.

This proposal is an investment in workforce development, economic stability, and student success. It strengthens our ability to attract, support, and retain high-quality educators in every region of our state.

I urge you to support the use of supplemental budget funds to increase the starting salary for educators to \$50,000. Our students deserve stable schools staffed by dedicated professionals who can afford to remain in the communities they serve.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to public education.



Karen MacDonald  
Westbrook  
LD 2212

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