

Good morning, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and other members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee;

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

Thank you all for your time this morning, and your work on behalf of educators across Maine.

My name is Pamela Kinsey and I work in the Easton School District as the Music Director, and actually, the entire Music Department!

I am here today to testify in support of the Governor's proposed supplemental budget (LD2212), especially as it pertains to Education: the increase to the Minimum Teacher Salary; maintaining the 55% funding for Education; and the proposed School Bus Safety measures.

As I near the end of my teaching career, I look back and forward. The minimum Teacher Salary when I first began was low. Luckily, I was married, also to a teacher, and between the two salaries, we were able to make ends meet, purchase a home and raise two children. Luckily, they did not choose expensive, four-year colleges, since those costs would not have been manageable on our combined salaries. Since the minimum Teacher salary was raised to \$30,000, with subsequent cost of living increases, the minimum salary today should be \$47,000. It is not...and in my local situation, our minimum is low even by Maine's standards at only \$42,200. The average Maine beginning teacher's salary is currently \$41,163, ranking 37<sup>th</sup> in the nation. This salary does not attract the best applicant pool, as it is not a living wage for a professional. Beginning teachers often cannot afford to concentrate solely on their teaching...definitely a full-time vocation...as they must supplement their income with second and sometimes third jobs just to meet rent, child care, college loans and daily bills. In our school system, we have at least two staff members that seriously had to consider working for nothing or quitting the profession. I have heard of other young teachers wondering if they can afford to have children or own a home. Their salaries simply do not meet their household needs. Beginning teachers do get steps, helping their salary to increase. Veteran teachers, at the top of the scale, do not have the luxury of those steps, so often the salary is far below keeping up with inflation and even going backward. This obviously comes into play for those nearing retirement, like me, where we must look at each year and the extra 2% it will add to our 'forever' salary. On its own, 2% isn't much, but if you multiply it over 10 years, it adds an extra \$14,000, and obviously that doubles to 20 years and it multiplies exponentially for each extra year of service (An extra two years of service will add roughly \$56,000 over 20 years of retirement, should we all be so lucky). And that's it. Of course, I would also like to address the cap on the COLA for retirees, but that is a discussion for another day. Getting our base salary to the suggested minimum salary of \$50,000 is definitely a step in the right direction and local schools can work with this base to make sure that it feeds up through to those at the top of the salary scale. It would be nice to think that a teacher could choose when to retire based on

things other than 'will I have enough money in my pension moving forward to be able to afford my financial responsibilities, or do I really need to continue to work?'

The state continuing to fulfill their obligation to fund local schools at 55% is also crucial for small, rural schools. While I feel the funding formula also needs work, 55% is a good place to be, helping to alleviate the stress on communities, where residents are feeling the burden of the rising costs of everyday necessities such as food and heat.

The two recent tragedies with school busses make the suggested bus safety measures incredibly important. Our local bus drivers were horrified by these senseless and preventable incidents. We owe it to all school children to do whatever it takes to make transportation of our most precious cargo and future Maine leaders and citizens as safe as is humanly possible.

Retrofitting older busses and insisting that all busses going forward are equipped with the safety measures needed should be of paramount and non-negotiable importance. Thank you for instituting these lifesaving features as soon as possible.

Again, thank you for your time and consideration today and thank you for your continued support of these educational components and the supplemental budget, LD2212.

Pamela Kinsey