

Scott D. Sevigny
P.O. Box 311
Fort Kent, ME 04743-0311
Mobile Telephone: 2067-316-6460
scottsevigny@sad27.org

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Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing
Attention: Senator Michael Tipping, Senate Chair
Representative Amy Roeder, House Chair
Cross Building, Room 202
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing:

My name is Scott Sevigny and I am submitting this letter in support of L.D. 185, **An Act to Reduce the Benefit Penalty Imposed on Career Educators Who Retire After 35 Years of Service**. I kindly asked the Honorable Senate President Troy D. Jackson to submit this bill and I am thankful for his effort in sponsoring this important piece of legislation. I firmly believe it will impact all career educators from the Piscataqua River Bridge, to the western Maine mountains, east to West Quoddy Head, and north to the St. John Valley.

I am currently halfway through my thirty-first year of teaching. I love teaching and I look forward to interacting with my students each day of the school year. After graduating from the University of Maine at Farmington in 1992, I have had the privilege of teaching students in grades nine through twelve for thirty years in Maine School Administrative District No. 27 at Fort Kent Community High School and I also taught one year in Maine School Administrative District No. 61 at Lake Region High School in Naples.

There have always been great demands placed upon teachers. Whether a professional is a first year teacher or a veteran educator, we have always endured budgetary issues, new teaching initiatives and training standards, and local, state, and federal policies that directly impact the classroom. Since March, 2020, the pandemic has brought about a multitude of measures to insure a safe learning environment for everyone in Maine public schools. Teachers across Maine also realized that it was imperative to deliver high quality lessons each day during the pandemic. The demands and stressors on educators have increased a lot in my thirty-one years of teaching and the pay has remained steady. For example, during the Great Recession, it was common for my teaching colleagues around Maine to negotiate collective bargaining agreements that froze steps to maintain the line on local budgets.

When I started teaching in August, 1992, I was twenty-two years old and I knew what the expectations were of me as a professional. I am also a "cliff employee" because I did not have ten years of service when the law was changed in 1993 to help balance the state budget. I believe that L.D. 185 will reward educators who have taught our children in Maine schools by allowing them to retire after thirty-five years of creditable service and to reduce the retirement benefits by 2% for each year before reaching the age of 60. Under the current statutes, early retirement would cost a career educator like myself a 6% reduction in retirement benefits per year before the age of sixty-two. As I look at my colleagues who entered the profession in the early 2000's, their retirement age was bumped up to the age of sixty-five. The solution proposed in L.D. 185 seems fair and reasonable for those who have dedicated thirty-five years of their life to educating future generations of children in the great State of Maine. Thirty-five years of service in any one profession speaks volumes of the dedication, commitment, and conviction of that individual.

I fully understand that there are many concerns about L.D. 185, specifically the funding liability and the fact that it is difficult for superintendents to hire and keep highly qualified educators in Maine classrooms. If a veteran educator wants to retire under the provisions in this bill, then they may do so in a dignified way. The proposed bill allows a veteran educator to retire and return to the classroom if they so wish and to do so in conjunction with the statutes that are currently in place. In addition, I believe L.D. 185 will entice young professionals to make a career out of teaching knowing that they have this option.

I would like to sincerely thank the members of the Joint Committee on Labor and Housing for reading this letter and for giving careful consideration to L.D. 185. I would also like to thank the Honorable Senate President Troy D. Jackson for submitting this bill on behalf of all career educators in the State of Maine.

Sincerely,

Scott D. Sevigny
Social Studies Teacher
Fort Kent Community High School