

Testimony of Jeff McCabe
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989

In Support of LD 258, "An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025" (Emergency)
(Governor's Bill)
Sponsored by Representative Melanie Sachs

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs,
and the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

February 28, 2023, State House Room 228, and Electronically

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, member of the Committee on Agriculture Conservation and Forestry, I'm Jeff McCabe, director of politics and legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. The Maine Service Employees Association represents over 13,000 workers across the state, including workers in all three branches of Maine State Government

We fully support efforts in this budget to address recruitment and retention in key positions across the proposed budget under the jurisdiction of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. Reorganizations and reclassifications are vital.

We have seen some great initiatives and appreciate key leadership of the department working to address the evolving needs of Maine people and producers, and the sustainability of our commodities. We appreciate the passion of the Governor for recognizing the Natural Resource Agencies are a key driver the economic engine of the State of Maine. Our farms, parks, forests and wildlife are vital to our Maine brand and key recreational uses.

Agencies are attempting to meet Maine's needs relating to climate change, PFAS (per- and polyfluorinated substances) invasive species and more. At this turning point for Maine, key positions in forestry, parks, planning, land use, agriculture and more are only getting harder to fill and keep filled as state employee wages and benefits are no longer competitive. In fact, the 2020 State of Maine Market Study Report shows state employees on average earn 15% less than their counterparts doing similar work throughout New England, even after adjusting for regional differences. The State Employee Pay Gap has worsened since then.

Yet our Parks continue to smash attendance records; it's the third straight year of attendance records for state park campgrounds with over 319,000 visitor nights in 2022. In addition, shoulder-season use, the timeframe between peak season and offseason, will only grow as well.

However, our workers feel that not enough has been done to bring wages to a place they need be at. There aren't enough workers in state parks and elsewhere to keep up with the high demand for services. In 2023, the State should not be okay with continuing to pay wages so low to workers employed in full-time positions that they're eligible for public assistance programs.

The State is advertising numerous jobs at \$15 an hour.

One Example: Park Ranger - Year-Round - Camden Hills State Park – 1111
Camden, Maine, United States | Parks & Recreation | Full-time
Apply by: March 9, 2023

The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, Bureau of Parks and Lands is recruiting to fill that year-round, 52-week position of Park Ranger at Camden Hills State Park.

BRIEF JOB DESCRIPTION: Class Code: 9211; Range: 13; Pay: \$15.00/hour; 40 hours/week. This is maintenance and personal services work in providing services to park users, maintaining and repairing facilities, and equipment at a state park or day use area, and acting as an assistant to the Park Manager. Responsibilities include meeting the public and providing for their needs, taking a leading role during emergency situations; safely and skillfully utilizing tools, equipment, and machinery necessary to maintain and protect land and water areas, buildings, equipment, and other physical facilities at state parks and day use areas. The Park Ranger directs and oversees the daily field operations of a small number of employees and is responsible for performing administrative tasks, acting in the Managers stead when that individual is off duty. Responsibilities also include training staff in all mandated annual training requirements including safe operation of equipment, Personal Protective Equipment, Hazardous Energy Control Program, Bloodborne Pathogens, Hazard Communication, Safety Data Sheets, and Emergency Operating Procedures. Work is performed under general supervision of the Park Manager.

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS: One year of experience in park maintenance and operation or equivalent.

In testimony both from our members and the departments of Maine State Government before these committees and others on the proposed State Budget, it's clear that the various reclassifications and reallocations across all Executive Branch departments must be fully funded.

We're here to ask, as an important next step in addressing the State's broken classification system, that this Legislature provide the funding necessary for the Executive Branch to both complete and implement the ongoing review of the State compensation and classification systems.

Thank you and I'm happy to take any questions.