



The Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Testimony from Jason Judd, Executive Director, Educate Maine

In Support Of

L.D. # 1064: “An Act to Increase the Minimum Teacher Salary”

April 6, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Jason Judd, Executive Director of Educate Maine. I represent a business-led organization with 2/3 of our board of directors coming from the business sector. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of L.D. #1064.

Educate Maine’s mission is to ensure that Maine people are prepared to succeed in education and career and that all Maine people reach their highest educational potential. As a member of the MaineSpark coalition, we measure this by attainment - the share of adult workers with a postsecondary credential of value in demand by Maine employers. Maine’s goal is to reach 60% by 2025. In order to reach this goal, we believe that our learners need exceptional educators who help them gain the skills, knowledge, and credentials needed to thrive in postsecondary education and in the workforce.

We have a crisis happening in the teaching profession. In 2022, more than 1,300 teachers, education technicians, administrators, and other educators left their jobs and almost 1000 educators retired. Maine’s pre-service teaching institutions are seeing declining enrollment and less learners opting into teacher pathways. Educator roles are going unfilled at schools across the state. We constantly hear stories about educators leaving the profession because they can attain higher wages in a wide variety of other professions with better working conditions. I began my professional career as a teacher. My first teaching salary was \$23,500 as a first-year English teacher. Although I loved teaching, I was not able to stay in the role for more than a few years because of the salary offered. I was one of so many teachers who pursued administration because I still loved working with students, but I needed a higher wage to transition out of poverty. I am here today but I don’t want Maine teachers to have to make this choice like I did. We need to keep exceptional educators in the classroom and pay them for the essential role they have with our students.

Our board of directors, a group that includes CEOs and other business leaders from all regions of the state, has identified raising teacher salaries as one of the top three policy priorities for our organization. We feel strongly about this issue because we are losing exceptional teachers every year due to the low wages available to teachers in Maine. The average wage for teachers

in Maine is less than all of the other states in New England. Without significant wage increases especially for our new teachers, we will continue to lose educators to other professions and other states. The strengths of our schools rely on the teaching workforce. We must invest in these educators in order to strengthen our schools and be able to recruit and retain more educators into the profession.

Investing in Maine's teachers also supports our economy. Our teachers help develop the future workforce of our state. Many of you are familiar with the *Making Maine Work* report published by the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, Maine Development Foundation, and Educate Maine. This publication highlights the priorities for Maine's business community. Three of the top six priorities relate to expanding our workforce. We need to increase the number of entry level workers, trade workers, and professional workers to meet the demands of our economy. Our classroom teachers are the people who prepare our students to join the workforce. We must work together to attract and retain high quality teachers to our schools. Our business leaders see this bill as a key strategy to strengthen our future workforce and provide teachers with the compensation needed for the essential work that they do each day.

I would like to remind the Committee and your other legislative colleagues that it is also important that Maine raise the minimum salaries of our early educators, who teach our youngest learners in child care and Head Start/Early Head Start programs. Soon, there will be another proposal before your HHS Committee colleagues that will propose raising the child care educators' wage supplements an additional \$200 per month, which would be an annual salary of \$35,776. This is still well below the \$50,000 minimum that you are considering for PK-12 teachers. All of our teachers deserve appropriate wages for the essential work they do regardless of what grade levels they teach. I encourage you to prioritize raising wages for all teachers through supporting both this bill and the early childhood bill later in the session. Thank you for your time.

Jason Judd
Educate Maine