

## Maine Education Association

Grace Leavitt President | Jesse Hargrove Vice President | Beth French Treasurer  
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

**Testimony  
In Support of  
LD 1064 An Act to Increase the Minimum Teacher Salary  
Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association  
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs  
April 6, 2023**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Grace Leavitt. My pronouns are she, her, hers. I am serving as President of the Maine Education Association while on leave from teaching Spanish in MSAD 51. I have over 43 years of classroom teaching experience with 20 years as a National Board Certified teacher. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators in our Maine system of public education in pre-K-12 schools as well as in our institutions of higher education, both the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System, along with students in teacher preparation programs as well as many retired educators.

I am here to testify on behalf of MEA in support of LD 1064 An Act to Increase the Minimum Teacher Salary.

We are all very aware of the critical shortages of teachers we continue to see in our state.

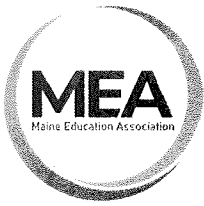
MEA has been checking with MainePERS periodically to monitor the situation. While the number of teachers who retire has not fluctuated too much, the number of teachers who leave the retirement system for reasons other than retirement, who quit the profession, is alarming. For example, in June 2015, this number was 46. In June 2022, the number was **179**. In August 2015, the number was 125. And in August 2022, **245** left the profession. Annually, the number of teachers leaving the profession (not retiring) went from 246 over the course of 2017 to **596** this past year.

We know that enrollment in teacher preparation programs has been declining for years. So while there is a greater number exiting the profession, at the same time we have fewer entering the field.

We have been monitoring the ‘teacher pay penalty’ as well. This is the ‘penalty’ for being a teacher versus what you would earn in other professions where a similar level of education is required. The calculation takes into account the difference in number of work days (though I hope you realize that the majority of teachers also work on unpaid days like weekends, school breaks, and even the summer break, not to mention evenings, in order to plan and prepare lessons, assess student work, communicate with students and parents, etc.). On page 2 of the August 2022 article, “The teacher pay penalty has hit a new high”, by the Economic Policy Institute<sup>1</sup>, you will find a summary of key findings including these:

Adjusted for inflation, the average weekly wages of teachers increased \$29 from 1996 to 2021; for other college graduates the increase was \$445.

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The teacher wage penalty grew from 6.1% in 1996 to 23.5% in 2021. (Currently in Maine, the teacher pay penalty is 24%.)

The National Education Association Research Department publishes rankings every April. The latest rankings will be published in a few weeks, but according to the April 2021 rankings report, the average teacher's salary in Maine was \$55,276, placing Maine as 29<sup>th</sup> in the nation in average teacher salary (it is important to note the large percentage of teachers in Maine who are nearing retirement age and thus are at the higher end of salary schedules, driving up the overall average.) In New England, Maine is last when we compare the average teacher salary in New Hampshire (\$59,622), Vermont (\$61,108), Rhode Island (\$75,336), Connecticut (\$78,427), and Massachusetts (\$84,290).

Out of curiosity, I recently compared what my salary would be now in the district where I taught in Massachusetts prior to coming to Maine—my teacher salary here, in a district that does have one of the better salary schedules in Maine, is approximately 75% of what it would be if I were still teaching at my previous school in Massachusetts.

While the shortages are affecting all parts of our state, we do hear about the greater struggles to recruit—and importantly to retain—teachers in parts where the pay is lower. There are districts where the top of the BA scale does not even reach \$50K. And many districts where the salary schedule is very long (over 20 steps) and schedules with 'multi-year steps'—all of which lowers a teacher's career earnings and impacts teacher retention.

Raising the starting salary to \$50K will go a long way towards recruitment. It will of course mean that other adjustments to the rest of the scale will need to be made. It will take time, but that will of course help with retention.

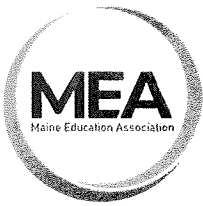
There have been numerous surveys and reports seeking solutions to the crisis. And survey after survey, report after report comes to the same conclusion—better compensation. Yes, there are also other aspects of the job that need to improve—working conditions, more supports for students' social/emotional needs, and better support for educators, as well as greater respect for the profession and the expertise of educators. But the top issue is compensation. Please note that the Maine Department of Education's TeachMaine plan includes as a strategy, "Compensate Educators Competitively."

For many years, I taught classes part-time at St. Joseph's College in addition to my full-time teaching at Greely. I spoke often with students at St. Joseph's who were in the education program there, and of course encouraged them to seek teaching positions in Maine when they graduated. But too often, even those students who were from Maine, would remark that they would be looking at other states, since the pay would be higher. They were quite aware of the disparity in compensation.

Maine is, as we all know, an incredible place to live, to raise a family—we all enjoy so many wonderful things about our state. And teaching is, in my opinion, the best profession of all professions. The rewards, other than financial, are incredible. But people have to also be realistic and practical. And teaching should not mean one has to sacrifice their financial stability, or that of their family, or that of their future in retirement.

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Teaching is the profession that prepares people for all other professions. And should be compensated accordingly.

We have amazing educators in our state, despite the situation. They are dedicated to their students, and work hard to provide the best education we can for our kids. But if we don't do more, much more, to recruit, to respect, and to retain educators in Maine the shortages we are seeing now, which are already critical, will worsen.

Raising the starting teacher salary to \$50,000 as called for in LD 1064 will be a big step toward addressing the shortage.

We urge you to vote 'ought to pass' on LD 1064. We need to do this now, before it is too late.

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<sup>1</sup>"The Teacher Pay Penalty Has Hit a New High," by Sylvia Allegretto, Economic Policy Institute, August 16, 2022, [epi.org/251657](https://www.epi.org/251657)

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