

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

Thank you so much for taking the time to hear public comments on this critical and timely issue today. My name is Isabelle Weyl and I am a resident of Portland. I currently work as a Library Media Specialist at Deering High School in Portland. We are currently the most diverse high school North of Boston and are appreciative of the ways in which the state has supported all our students in the past.

What brings me here before you today is the issue of compassion and quality of life for our Educational Technicians. Ed Techs as they are commonly referred to are tasked with maintaining some of the riskier and more exacting tasks that allow the rest of the staff to do their best work, and allow every student access to the fullest and most vibrant education possible.

Before I worked at Deering, my mother served for many years as a substitute ed tech in the Functional Life skills program. This work involved not just making every student feel comfortable, welcome and understood, but also helping them get around in wheelchairs, and sometimes assisting them in eating and using the bathroom. She is now retired.

Still, this enormous labor of love, creativity and energy must be carried and to do so we must properly compensate these individuals for their labor. This work is rewarding but also can be exhausting and feel overwhelming.

When the pay does not match the critical amount of skill and passion for the job we lose great people. We lose them to other industry and organizations with better compensation. This means we risk being out of alignment with students IEPs. That is not good for anyone. Perhaps it is impossible to describe how a great one on one can change the trajectory of a student's life, but I can attest that it happens all the time. Please give these men and women the dues they deserve and the recognition of so many jobs well done.

I therefore urge you to support the proposals in front of you. This will encourage more people to take and stay in these jobs while also knowing they can take care of themselves at the same time.

Thank you for hearing testimony today and for your service to our state.