

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 955—AN ACT TO ADDRESS SHORTAGES OF SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF BY INCREASING THE MINIMUM HOURLY WAGE FOR THOSE STAFF

L.D. 974—AN ACT TO ESTABLISH MINIMUM PAY FOR EDUCATIONAL TECHNICIANS AND OTHER SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF

L.D. 1237—AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A MINIMUM HOURLY WAGE FOR SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF

L.D. 1314—AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A MINIMUM SALARY FOR EDUCATIONAL SPECIALISTS, EDUCATIONAL TECHNICIANS AND SCHOOL TEACHING PROFESSIONALS

L.D. 1398—AN ACT TO INCREASE TEACHER SALARIES

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Steven Bailey, executive director of Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association, in opposition to the following L.D.s: 955, 974, 1237, 1314 and 1398. These testimonies are consistent with our previous testimony in opposition to L.D. 1064.

MSSA and MSBA are both in support of seeing salaries for teachers and educational support professionals increase. Both Associations provided supportive testimony for the last bill that helped raise the minimum salary of all teachers in Maine to \$40,000. It is true that increases in salary will help recruit and retain quality professionals to provide the quality learning for our students in our classrooms across the state. School districts who were in need of still getting to this \$40,000 minimum are in the third year of the ramp up to this minimum figure. While some districts were already beyond this figure within their collective bargaining agreements, there were many that were not, even with the state funds to help support this increase within districts. Raising the minimum also had the impact of increasing other salaries higher up in salary schedules as these collective bargaining agreements have been renegotiated. This has had the impact of raising the entire budget in these school districts.

The design of the bills are well constructed; yet, given the fact that while most districts have recovered from the most recent increases, except for pockets of districts here and there, MSSA and MSBA are opposed to seeing these L.D.s move forward at this time. Our associations are opposed to these bills because our members believe Augusta should not be dictating rates of increase for salaries and wages in schools. That needs to be a local decision.

We know that increased teacher salaries can have a positive impact to attract and retain qualified teachers within our schools. Providing this financial support to highlight teaching within Maine's Public Schools as THE job to seek would be a benefit of this type of increase. Our Associations recognize this and would like to see these increases be viable. We also know there have been bills proposed to increase the minimum wage of

the educational support professionals within schools. The Associations see problems with all of these bills moving forward.

MSSA and MSBA need to better understand the funding stream for all of the recommended increases in salaries. We understand the level of support that will be provided to reach the minimum salary but what level of state support will be provided as contracts are renegotiated to reflect and change in the rest of collective bargaining agreements? Will state education funding increase to cover those costs, in the near and long term? It should not come from one-time funding because when that funding goes away the burden will fall on communities.

With proposed budgets still tight, and many districts still working to provide additional supports for students with socio and emotional needs related to learning during Covid-19, and for those students who still need additional assistance to accelerate learning due to difficulties experienced during the pandemic, many districts are expecting a funding cliff that potentially will impact them for the immediate future. Districts are struggling with budgets right now due to the increase in valuation, where many towns are required to pay more towards education, combined with the decrease in economically disadvantaged subsidy. 75-80% of school budgets are made up of salaries and benefits. If the increases in salaries fall on the taxpayers, we worry that budgets will not pass and that will have a negative impact on the services we need to provide to our students. School Boards understand that and it is a major reason why the vast majority of school budgets pass in Maine. Boards are in touch with their community and what their local taxpayers can accept in terms of budget increases. It would be helpful to have a financial analysis of what each of these bills will cost in the near and long term. We should not commit to a plan without understanding what impact it will have on school budgets in our communities.

The timing is just not right, according to the two Associations, to support this bill right now. A statewide mandate of this magnitude at this time takes away local control. MSSA and MSBA recommend that L.D. 955, 974, 1237, 1314, and 1398 all ought not to pass.